



THE INDEPENDENT

N° 3,374

FRIDAY 18 APRIL 1997

WEATHER: Dry and sunny

(IR45p) 40p



You think politicians don't matter? She knows better

Oxfam report attacks the West's unbending and self-serving approach to Third World debt

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

Western politicians and the International Monetary Fund have been attacked for obstructing policies that could save the lives of more than 3 million children in Africa and Latin America.

Oxfam yesterday criticised both the IMF and leaders from the Group of Seven industrial countries for lack of vision, because of their efforts to block reductions in the payments that some of the poorest countries in the world must make to the very richest.

The aid charity said that the IMF, along with the German, Japanese and American Governments had been "systematically undermining" financial relief for countries such as Uganda and Bolivia, even though they had an excellent record of economic reform.

It praised Britain for its efforts to reduce their developing world debt burdens: Kenneth Clarke is the politician who has done more than anyone to get the debt issue onto the world's agenda. But generally, British politicians have been silent during the election campaign about the future of our contributions to the developing world.

The Conservative manifesto does not mention aid, while Labour affirms its commitment in principle to spending 1.7 per cent of national income on overseas aid. But both the main parties are committed to spending plans that cut the overseas aid budget.

• The total cost of the plan is equivalent to the US's annual spending on running shoes

in the US, or the sum by which Britain's Treasury got its forecast for last year's government borrowing wrong.

These modest debt relief proposals, agreed despite IMF objections in Washington last October after a two-year British initiative, were due to come into effect early this year, for the countries with the best economic records. But officials admit that none of the heavily indebted developing countries is now likely to benefit before the end of next year. Many will have to wait at least six more years.

Sources close to Mr Clarke said he remained committed to seeing the debt package get through. Clare Short, shadow Minister for Overseas Development, said:

amounting to six times its national health budget this year, or more than the cost of providing primary education for four children in every family.

A 12-month delay will cost Bolivia twice its health budget, or 17 times its planned spending on clean water and sanitation.

The heavily indebted very poor countries have the lowest human welfare indicators in the world, according to UN statistics.

The plan to reduce the burden of debt repayments has run into trouble because of a change of heart on the part of the US Government. It has decided to demand extra free market reforms along the lines of the "shock therapy" the IMF has put into practice in Eastern Europe as a condition of reduced interest payments.

This switch by its biggest shareholder puts those opposed to early debt relief in a majority on the Fund's board. The plan, pronounced a "done deal" by IMF managing director Michel Camdessus, last October, is now in danger of collapse.

British officials will continue to push for rapid implementation, but the general election campaign means no minister will be present in Washington for the Fund's mid-year meeting at the end of this month.

Sources close to Mr Clarke said he remained committed to seeing the debt package get through. Clare Short, shadow Minister for Overseas Development, said:

opment, said: "The international financial institutions must not be allowed to renege on commitments to the world's poorest countries."

The World Bank is also keen to prevent a delay. Its president, James Wolfensohn, has staked his reputation on doing a better job of alleviating poverty.

Officials at the two Washington-based institutions speak privately of serious, "high level" tension between the Bank and the Fund.

The latest obstacles will not hold up a bigger debt relief package agreed by individual rich country governments with their impoverished debtors.

But it is important because the IMF has tied its agreement to tough economic reform programmes.

Tory Emu policy now in shambles

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

John Major yesterday changed his position on the single currency so quickly that Michael Heseltine was unable to keep track. At one point yesterday evening, the Deputy Prime Minister angrily accused a BBC interviewer of gross distortion when she asked him about the latest actual twist in the Prime Minister's thinking.

After Mr Major had announced that Tory MPs would be let off the leash with a Commons free vote on any future decision to go into a European single currency, Tony Blair derided the peace offering to a party "in a state of civil war". He said: "There are two Tory parties, and Mr Major appears to be in charge of neither of them."

The Labour leader writes in today's *Independent* that Mr Major is making policy up as he goes along. "A free vote on the issue of monetary union amounts to a government admission that they cannot agree amongst themselves."

He says that voters have no idea which of the two Conservative parties would make the decisions; if Mr Major was re-elected, "Will it be the party of Ken Clarke and Michael Heseltine, or that of John Redwood and Michael Portillo?"

The Prime Minister earlier opened another astonishing day of dramatic developments on his party's European policy by slipping out a hint that Conservative backbenchers might be given the Commons free vote on the question of single currency membership.

Answering a question at his morning press conference, Mr Major said that while such decisions were taken at the time, "on constitutional matters I don't rule out the question of a free vote amongst backbenchers in the House of Commons."

That hint of a free vote was

promptly welcomed by Eurosceptics and pro-Europeans alike. Kenneth Clarke, the Chancellor, told BBC Radio 4's *The World at One* programme: "I think it will help address the present difficulty."

The "difficulty", he explained, was that MPs were pre-judging the issue, when the decision should be taken once the terms of entry had been negotiated – the Cabinet line that had been defied by ministers and candidates all week.

Mr Clarke revealed that he had not been consulted by Mr Major on the latest development of policy. "But that's because I've been out in the West Country," he said.

But that illustration of government decision-making was later capped by a row between Mr Heseltine and Charlie Lee-Potter, his interviewer, on the BBC Radio 4 PM programme.

She wanted to ask Mr Heseltine about the free-vote, but unfortunately she based her questions on the Prime Minister's latest statement – in which he had hardened up the press conference hint into a firm policy statement.

After a visit to Ellesmere Port, in the Wirral, Mr Major said: "It would be rather odd, would it not, to say you are going to have a referendum of every adult in the country, but then say backbench MPs are going to be dragged in in a particular way. So clearly the same principle must apply to them."

But Mr Heseltine was unaware of that critical, further change in government policy, and he roundly berated Ms Lee-Potter for "misquoting" "grossly distorting" and "exaggerating" what the Prime Minister had said.

The live broadcast caused some embarrassment at Conservative Central office last night. But officials emphasised that there was no disagreement between Mr Major and Mr Heseltine on the policy.



Second-class citizens: A child labourer in Bolivia. Health care, access to clean water and sanitation for the thousands like her is under threat. Photograph: Stuart Franklin/Magnum

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"*Turturro* gives a sensitive, engaging performance... Poetic, beautifully played, a real box of delights." *Sarah Bailey, Elle Magazine*

JOHN TURTURRO

Some people have a hard time unwinding.

A TOM DICILLO FILM

BOX OF MOONLIGHT

THE INDEPENDENT HARRIS POLL

Today's *Independent/Harris Poll* shows Labour maintaining an 18-point lead, with the narrowing of the gap from last week's 22 points well within sampling error.

Against a background of little movement in public opinion, the poll finds that 56 per cent think the election campaign is "boring" and will be glad when it is over, while 36 per cent said they were "interested" and trying to follow it.

Our findings are in line with the average of all five main polls, except that the Liberal Democrats are two points lower, despite a change at this week to remind people of them in Harris's interview.

HARRY QUICKLY
Co-Op suspends pair
while surrounded by
suspension of two senior executives
by the Co-Operative Wholesale Society yesterday, amid suspicions that they were involved with Lomica trust, which is seeking to buy parts of the business.
Page 21; Comment, page 23

11 April Now

Harris Research interviewed 1,136 adults face-to-face in their homes between 11 and 14 April.

Labour 52 49

Con 30 31

Lib Dem 12 13

Others 6 6

Scandal-hit Bibi says: I will not be removed

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, was fighting tooth and nail for his survival yesterday, after the dramatic and unprecedented call by Israeli police for him to be arrested.

Mr Netanyahu will learn on Sunday if he and three associates will be put on trial for "fraud and breach of trust."

Mr Netanyahu insisted yesterday that he would not resign, despite the police recommendations revealed on Wednesday evening.

"We are not going anywhere," he told a crowd of supporters. "We are staying in place where the people and country put us, and we will continue to lead the people."

At the Likud party headquarters in Tel Aviv, he declared: "Don't let your spirits sink. Stand strong. The truth will be victorious."



Netanyahu: Insisted he will not resign

Even if he is not indicted, Mr Netanyahu may find it difficult to remain prime minister for much longer. A government minister was quoted yesterday as saying: "The status of the government and the status of the prime minister have been very seriously damaged."

The indictment of Mr Derti, the indictment of Mr Hanegbi, the Justice Minister, and Avigdor Lieberman, head of the prime minister's office, came as no surprise.

But the government was taken by surprise by the revelation that the police want to put on trial the prime minister himself.

Mr Netanyahu was publicly resolute. He met Dennis Ross, the US peace envoy, yesterday.

But nobody expects any progress in the already troubled peace process while Israeli politics are dominated by Mr Netanyahu's fight to survive.

The scandal, known in Israel as the Bar-On affair, revolves around the appointment of an obscure Jerusalem lawyer called Ron Bar-On as Attorney-General in January.

Police say Mr Netanyahu, together with the head of his office and the Justice Minister, corruptly gave the job to Mr Bar-On so he would offer a plea bargain to Aryeh Deri, the leader of one party in the governing coalition, who is on trial for fraud and taking bribes.

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FROM FRIDAY APRIL 18TH
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WATERFRONT
LONDON
& FROM FRIDAY APRIL 25 AT SELECTED CINEMAS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

news

My blueprint for saving the worst school in Britain

New head plans to transform Ridings School

Lucy Ward
Education Correspondent

The troubleshooting assistant headteacher parachuted into the Ridings School in Halifax after a discipline crisis was yesterday appointed as the school's permanent head.

Anna White, brought in from a neighbouring comprehensive as associate head of the West Yorkshire comprehensive last October, said that after six months helping restore order she "could not bear to walk away".

In an exclusive interview with *The Independent*, she described the school's atmosphere as "infectious" and insisted she wanted to stay "to see the green schools of success flourish, as I firmly believe they will".

Ms White and acting head Peter Clark, on loan from another Calderdale comprehensive, were put in joint command of the Ridings after teachers threatened to strike over "unteachable" pupils.

Headteacher Karen Stanfield resigned and the school was temporarily closed following reports of assaults on staff before facing a highly critical inspection by the schools watchdog Ofsted.

Since then, monthly reports by government inspectors have recorded steady progress, and the school this week won the regional final of a youth drama competition with a dance performance expressing pupils' frustration at their vilification by reporters camped outside their classrooms last autumn.

Ms White's appointment came a day before the submission by Calderdale council of an emergency education action plan to Gillian Shepherd. The Secretary of State demanded the plan after the Labour-controlled authority came under fire in a damning report by Ofsted on its education service in the wake of the Ridings crisis.

The plan includes a proposal for a major school improvement project to be launched throughout Calderdale. It will aim to increase progress made by all pupils and will cover both exam success and issues such as attendance and motivation. There will be an urgent consultation with headteachers to establish priorities and a survey of secondary school students to establish how they feel

they learn best. In answer to Ofsted criticisms that it possesses too little information about pupils' achievements, the education authority proposes to keep much tighter checks

through a new database. The authority also proposes a series of methods to re-establish communications, including appointing two teacher representatives to its education committee.

Ms White, 42, who began her teaching career 17 years ago in Bury, Greater Manchester, said she would have hated to walk away from the Ridings without having seen through the changes she had helped set in motion. "Order has been restored for a long time now and behaviour standards and staff and student morale have improved dramatically," she said. "What is needed is a period of continuity and commitment."

The key priorities were now to continue efforts to raise teaching and learning standards at the school where, inspectors found, more than two-fifths of lessons were unsatisfactory and a religious education lessons for GCSE students consisted merely of drawing a church.

A further challenge for the new head will be the raising of pupil numbers, though the

A bad report ...

2 August 1996: Sarah Taylor, 13, is expelled for a violent attack on a teacher.

3 September: Sarah Taylor returns to class after being reinstated, but 31 members of the NASUWT union vote to refuse to teach her.

22 October: Head girl Karen Stanfield resigns.

23 October: School inspectors arrive after being sent in by the Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Shepherd.

1 November: Calderdale council plots a school after reports of attacks on teachers.

15 November: Peter Clark, temporary head teacher, expels 12 pupils and suspends another 23.

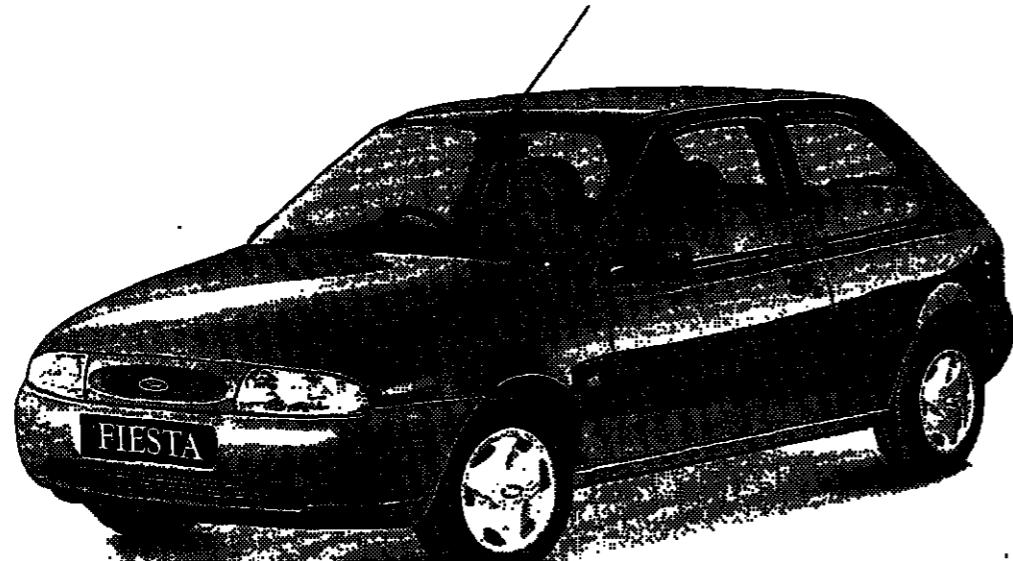
6 November: School is given three weeks to clear up its problems of indiscipline and underachievement or face being taken over by the Department for Education.

17 December: Ofsted inspectors reveal that the school is failing.



Staying on: Ridings head Anna White - 'Period of continuity and commitment needed' Photograph: Asadour Guzelian

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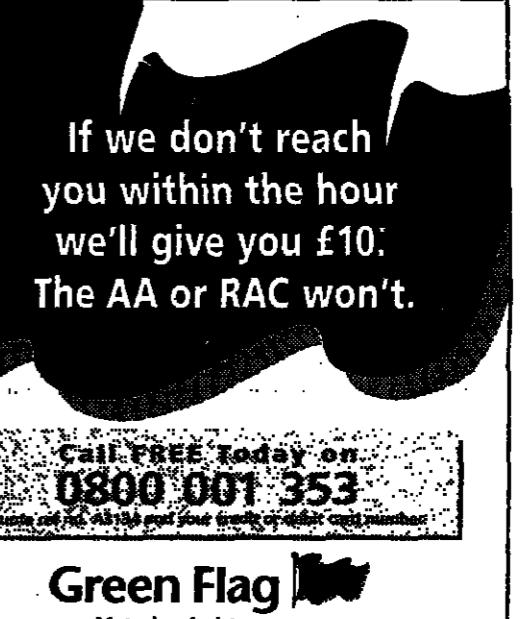
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Muggers stalk the super-rich

Carlton TV chief is latest victim of gangs who lie in wait for the wealthy



Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

A gang of robbers is targeting the super rich in London and are believed to be responsible for up to 16 attacks in which hundreds of thousands of pounds of jewels have been stolen.

It is understood that Scotland Yard have been tracking the team of criminals since Christmas although they are believed to have been carrying out assaults since June.

In most cases gang members have followed their targets and robbed them often at knife point, as they reach their homes. The robbers cruise expensive areas of London on the look-out for rich-looking



Victims of crime: Mr and Mrs Michael Green (left) and Bernie Ecclestone and his wife, Slavica, after he was beaten by robbers

people with valuable jewellery, clothes and cars.

The latest incident involved Michael Green, the chairman of Carlton Communications, who was stabbed by a mugger at the garage of his home in Mayfair.

Mr Green was slashed across the face and hands and his wife Tess's £1,000 necklace was snatched along with £500 and some credit cards during the attack on Tuesday night.

Other cases bearing similar hallmarks include Lady Weidenfeld, the wife of one of Britain's leading publishing tycoons, who was attacked and robbed of £100,000 worth of jewellery outside her Chelsea flat, on the Chelsea Embankment in February.

Lady Weidenfeld, 51, the

fourth wife of Lord Weidenfeld, chairman of publishing company Weidenfeld and Nicolson, was not harmed.

Last July Bernie Ecclestone, president of the Formula One

Constructors' Association, was beaten up when he tried to shield his wife from two robbers who lay in wait outside their home.

Mr Ecclestone, 65, and his wife, Slavica, were approached

by two men as they got out of their car near their home in London's Chelsea Square.

The assailants stole Mrs Ecclestone's ring, valued at between £600,000 and £700,000.

Rolex watch and threatened her twin eight-year-old sons.

In another attack a couple had £50,000 worth of jewellery snatched outside their home in Hampstead, north west London, last month.

Violent crime in London rose sharply last year with assaults and other offences involving violence against people jumping by 28 per cent.

Robberies, including mugging, leapt by 11 per cent.

Meanwhile Michael Green,

the television executive, has returned to work two days after his attack.

The robbery happened as Mr Green and his wife were returning home in their blue Rolls-Royce Corniche.

Mr Green drove into his garage, but as soon as he got out of the car

long they have been operating because they probably switch from one type of crime to another."

There are believed to be at least ten members of the gang.

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Detective Superintendent Brian Edwards, of the Metropolitan police major investigation squad, who is leading the inquiry, said the suggestion that a single gang was targeting the rich was "pure speculation".



Photographs: Alan Davidson/Absolute

M'learned friend, the master of the rolls

Clare Garner
and Becky Lloyd

The High Court descended into toilet humour yesterday, as Andrew defended his reputation as the issue with the softest touch.

Bundles of pink, blue and white lavatory paper decorated the witness box and the judge, Mr Justice Laddie, kept some to hand for closer inspection. Only the trademark Labrador puppy was missing.

"My Lord, it's a passing of motion," began David Young QC, counsel for the manufacturers Kimberly-Clark, with apparently no reference to bowel movement.

The case concerns an advertising gimmick dreamt up by Nouvelle paper, made by Fort Sterling, which has a 3 per cent



share of the market. By way of promoting its improved, recycled toilet paper as the softest on the market, Nouvelle is offering a free roll of its rival, Andrex, to any customer who disagrees. The offer is due to appear on packaging and feature in a series of television advertisements starting next week.

When shown Nouvelle's packet, which includes a yellow band with the words "Softness guaranteed (or we'll exchange it for Andrex)", three times as many of the 500 interviewees associated the product with Andrex, according to Mr Young.

Unwrapping a roll in order to examine it, the judge said that without, having the two brands side by side, most people sampling Nouvelle, "won't realise how they've been cheated from having the even softer feel of Andrex".

The case continues today.

• It appears to be a gang of robbers targeting anyone with an expensive car, watch or jewellery.

A month earlier Helen Moran, wife of Christopher Moran, one of Britain's wealthiest men, was attacked in the underground car park of her Chelsea home. The gang took her handbag and a £15,000

Rolex watch and threatened her

twins.

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news

Prisoners abroad: As a trafficker is told she can return to Britain, lawyers fight for the life of a convicted murderer in the US

Drugs smuggler swaps Bangkok cell for Holloway

Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

A British teacher jailed for 25 years in Thailand for heroin smuggling is expected to be released on parole in about six years' time after being allowed to serve the remainder of her sentence in a British prison.

Sandra Gregory, 31, will be transferred from her Bangkok cell to Holloway Prison, London, in the next eight to 10 weeks, after the British and Thai authorities agreed the move.

Family and friends of Gregory, who is from Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire, yesterday said they were delighted. Gregory has already served four years and two months of her sentence at the notorious "Bangkok Hilton" jail.

She is the sixth British citizen jailed in Thailand to be granted permission to complete their sentence in the United Kingdom under a treaty agreement.

She was arrested at Bangkok airport with Robert Lock from Cambridge, in February 1993, as the pair were about to board a flight to Japan. Gregory, who was found with 102 grammes of hero-

in in her possession, pleaded guilty but told the court Lock had paid her to smuggle the heroin out of Thailand.

Mr Lock was found not guilty last year. A British embassy official testified that Thai officials had been tipped off that he was a trafficker, and searched Gregory only because she checked in with him.

Gregory was jailed for 25 years for heroin smuggling in February 1996. An original death sentence was commuted because she had confessed.

Under Thai law, a convicted prisoner is eligible for parole after serving half the sentence, therefore Gregory can apply in about six years. She is likely to be successful providing she is not considered a danger to society.

She will initially be held at Holloway Prison where she will be assessed and categorised. She will then be able to apply for a move to a prison nearer to her family and friends.

Jackie Cox, of the Friends of Sandra Gregory group, said: "We are absolutely delighted. It's great news. It seems strange to be celebrating the fact that someone is coming into Holloway Prison to serve probably six years."

She added: "She is not having her sentence cut, that's quite clear... It is a humanitarian move which allows for a prisoner to move closer to their family."

But the mother of Robert Lock, who was cleared of assisting Gregory, said she still felt bitter against the prisoner who she claims falsely implicated her son.

She said: "I don't think anyone who is human would be overjoyed, do you? How would you answer that if it was your son?"

"It's very difficult but I really am more interested in a few other male prisoners out there who don't have the benefit of a private lawyer as she did."

But she added: "She's served her sentence, she's been punished. She was only carrying three ounces of heroin, according to the charges."

There are at present 1,879 British citizens in foreign jails either awaiting trial or having been convicted of a crime.



Coming home: Sandra Gregory in her Bangkok cell. She has served four years and two months of a 25-year sentence for heroin smuggling. Photograph: AP

Behind bars in foreign prisons

■ Under Thai law, a foreign prisoner who has served a certain time can apply to be repatriated to serve the rest of the sentence. The number of years already served varies according to the charges.

■ There are at present 1,879 British citizens in foreign jails either awaiting trial or having been convicted of a crime.

■ So far, 100 people have been returned to British jails under treaty agreements with 39 countries.

■ Under British law, a convict is eligible for parole after serving half his or her sentence.

Lawyers seek state aid for Briton on death row

Patricia Wynn Davies
Legal Affairs Editor

Trinidad, where his brother is Attorney General, but lived in London from 1980 to 1986, becoming a millionaire from a fruit importing business.

He has always admitted he was in the hotel room but claimed he was lured there by a man who failed to show up. He was convicted largely on the evidence of Neville Butler, a former employee who testified for the prosecution in return for immunity.

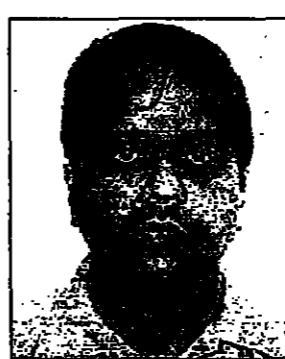
Maharaj had no obvious motive for the killings - the victims were former business associates from whom he was expecting to receive damages for a breach of contract.

By then he was running a newspaper for Miami's West Indian community. Having lost most of his money he could only hire a lawyer for a week.

The lawyer failed to call Maharaj as a witness in his own defence or object to the expert evidence, or insist on keeping the judge's insistence on keeping the jury sitting until late at night.

Halfway through the trial, the judge was arrested on charges of accepting bribes in other cases, but the lawyer failed to object when another judge took over the case instead of ordering a retrial.

The company that insured the dead men later found they were probably the victims of a drug-related assassination.



Krishna Maharaj: Last plea

Council chairman, David Perry-Davey QC, the Conservative MP Peter Bottomley, and Maharaj's daughter, Christina Nandall, 35, and his son, Chris Tasker, 31, to protest against the Foreign Office's refusal to provide funds for forensic ballistic and other investigations prior to the hearing on 16 June.

Following questions raised in the Commons about the case by Mr Bottomley in January, Liam Fox, a junior foreign office minister, insisted in a letter to the MP that the Capital Colateral Representative (CCR), Florida's assistance scheme for foreign nationals on death row, would provide representation.

But a letter on the same date from the CCR informed Maharaj's American attorney that it lacked the staff and resources to take on any more clients.

Maharaj was born in

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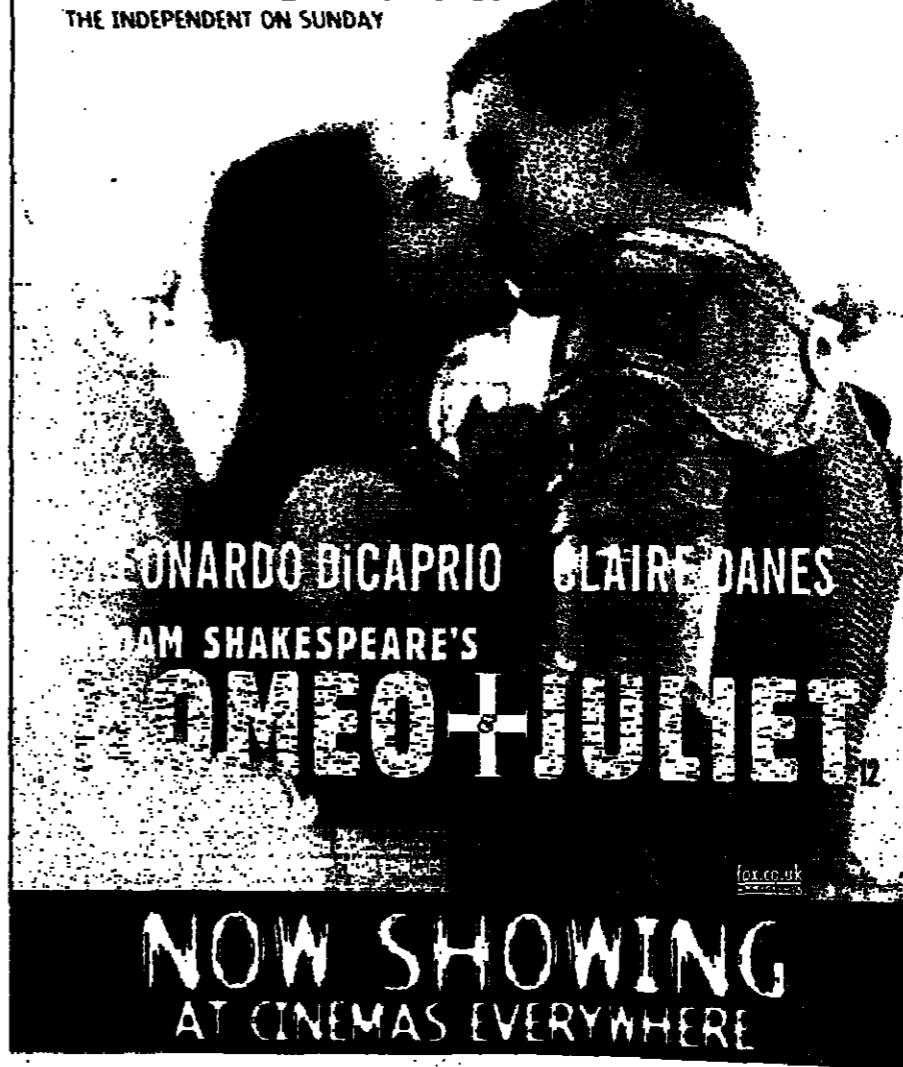
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ever in the US

news

Wheeze for importing cut-price cigarettes gets the Death sentence

Simon Reeve

Customs & Excise breathed a huge sigh of relief yesterday after a company threatening the government's £9bn-a-year revenue from domestic cigarette sales lost a crucial round in its European legal battle to import cheap tobacco into Britain.

The Enlightened Tobacco Company (ETC), the maker of Death cigarettes, had bypassed excise duties by acting as an "agent" for British customers and importing cigarettes from European Union member states which have lower taxes. It was able to offer cigarettes for sale at up to 40 per cent less than competitors' prices.

After a High Court case went against the company in 1995 and prevented it from trading, ETC took its argument to the European Court of Justice. The case may have led the way to companies across Europe supplying cheap tobacco, alcohol and other luxury goods. Nine mem-

An alternative ruling would have been a major blow to newsagents and off-licences.

ber states, including Germany and Italy, were so fearful of losing billions in tax revenue that they submitted evidence in support of United Kingdom Customs & Excise to the court.

Yesterday morning an interim decision from the Advocate General of the court ruled ETC's scheme illegal. Although this "opinion" is not final, and the Court could pass a different decision in the autumn, it is unlikely to do so and ETC admitted it has a "snowball's chance in hell" of starting its "mail-order" scheme again.

ETC introduced the scheme, which exploited a loophole in European law, in response to the lifting of trade barriers. By buying cigarettes in bulk in Luxembourg, ETC was able to offer Britons who ordered through their agent, called "the Man in Black", up to 800 cigarettes at massive savings.



Up in smoke: BJ Cunningham, head of ETC, lighting up in London yesterday after the EU court ruling. Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

They argued that an agent acting on behalf of a "private individual" was acting lawfully and under European law. Threatened with losing billions in revenue, Customs disagreed, and impounded a consignment of ordered cigarettes at Dover on the grounds that duty was payable in the UK because the cigarettes were deemed to be a personal import.

The case hinged on the interpretation of the word "them" in an

EC directive which states people can buy some goods free of excise when the goods are acquired by "private individuals for their own use and transported by them". The ETC agent, who takes a commission from each sale, was arranging transport and organising payment of the retailer and carrier.

The Commission said it interprets its own law as allowing an agent to act on behalf of an individual as long as the agent does not make a profit.

"All Europe offers is straight bananas and Euro-babble. We are gutted."

Customs & Excise, in contrast, were delighted. An alternative ruling "would have been a major blow to all the retail trade - particularly people like newsagents and also, some 'off-licences,'" said Mark Thomson from Customs, who put the possible loss of revenue at £2bn a year.

Mr Cunningham, however, is



Packing up: Two-in-one cigarettes, (above), which are sold in Holland, and (below) ETC's Death cigarettes the sale of which in Britain prompted the European decision



"bloodied and unbowed" and has another business wheeze. He wants to offer Britons the two-in-one cigarettes he is already selling in Holland.

The cigarettes are subject to normal tax duties, are extra long with a filter in the middle so that they can be split to make two cigarettes. If Mr Cunningham gets his way, he will soon be selling 40 of the cigarettes for the same price as a pack of 20.

Docklands bomb suspect questioned

David McKittrick
Ireland Correspondent

A man from South Armagh was yesterday flown to London from Northern Ireland for questioning by Metropolitan police detectives investigating last February's IRA bombing of London's docklands. Two people died in the attack, which caused widespread damage. The bombing signalled the end of the IRA's 17-month ceasefire.

The man, who has not been named, is from the border village of Cullyhanna and was taken to Paddington Green police station. He was one of a number held by police and troops following a large-scale security operation in the area last week.

In another sequel to last week's operation, three men appeared in a Co Down court charged with a series of terrorist offences. One of them, Martin McGinn, was charged with three murders, including that of Lance-Bombardier Stephen Restorick, who was killed in a sniper attack at a checkpoint in the Co Armagh village of Bessbrook in February.

Mr McGinn, 39, from Castleblayney in the Irish Republic, was also charged with the murders of Lance-Bombardier Andrew Garrett, who died in a similar attack in December 1993, and of former UDR soldier Gilbert Johnston, who was shot dead in South Armagh 19 years ago.

Michael Caraher, 30, from Cullyhanna in South Armagh, was charged with the attempted murder of an RUC constable who was injured in a gun attack last month.

Together with Martin Mines, 28, from Glassdrumman Road, Crossmaglen, the two men were also charged with conspiracy to murder, membership of the IRA, and possession of a Barrett bolt-action rifle, an AKM assault rifle and ammunition. Appearances separately in court, they were all remanded in custody until 7 May.

In 1990 Michael Caraher was seriously injured and his brother Fergal killed in an incident when troops opened fire on a car. Two Royal Marines were later acquitted on a charge of murdering Fergal Caraher.

Mr McGinn appeared in the dock with his hands handcuffed behind his back until the magistrate ordered his arms should be freed. His face appeared bruised and his defence solicitor listed injuries he alleged had been inflicted by soldiers.

The solicitor said he had been injured on the nose, the right ear, the head, both eyes, the right shoulder, the right arm and the lower back and knees. An RUC detective-inspector said that when Mr McGinn was apprehended there was a struggle, but he could not comment on whether he had any injuries before then.

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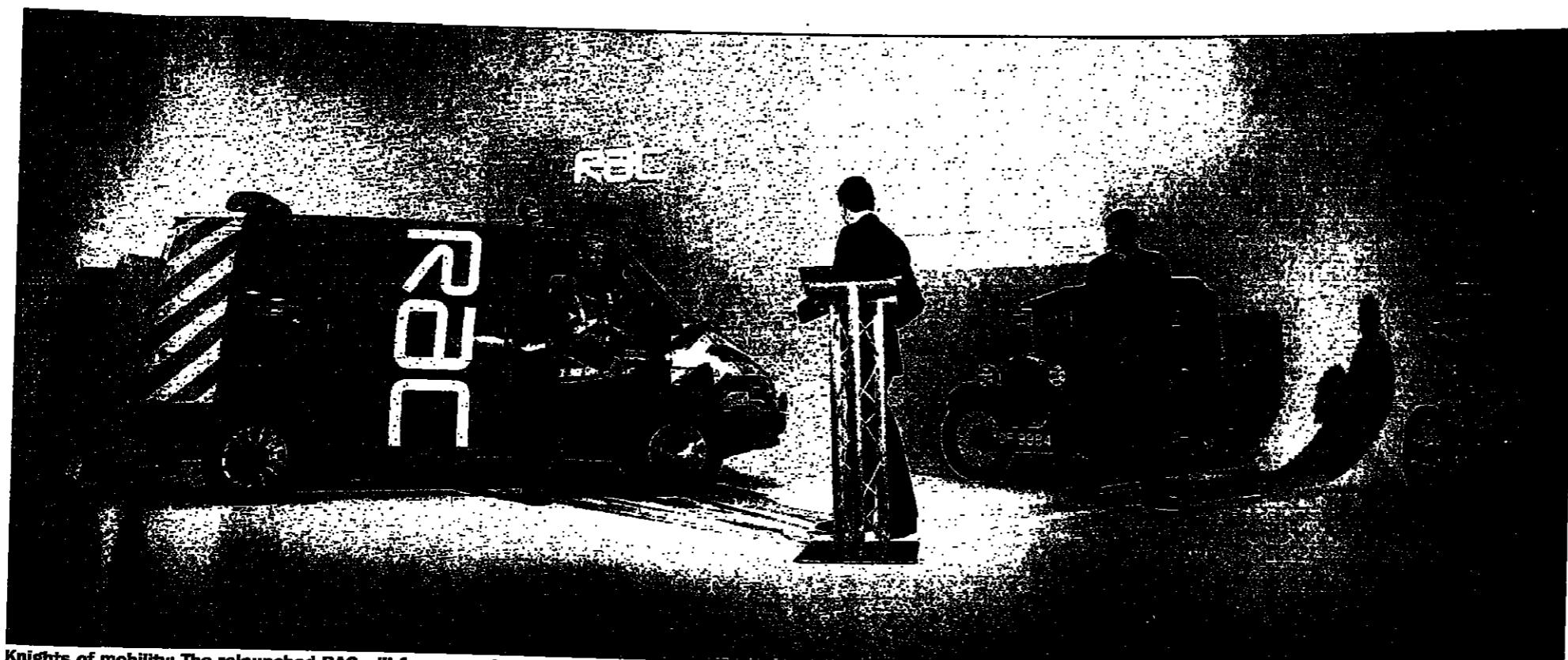
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news

RAC puts on cycle clips for the future



Motorist's friend: RAC logos from 1897 (top)



Knights of mobility: The relaunched RAC will focus on all forms of transport, not just motoring, and offers cyclists insurance cover

Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

After a century of championing the car, the RAC relaunched itself yesterday with a pledge to not promote the motorist at the expense of public transport.

The radical rethink will see a new approach, new colours and a new type of member – the cyclist. Now keen to promote all

forms of transport, not just motoring, the RAC said it was offering special bike insurance cover.

Bicycle legal protection will cover claims for personal injury and uninsured losses such as damage to bicycle or clothes due to accidents. The annual cost will be £6 for an RAC member and £10 for a non-motoring member.

The move will also see the

club drop the crown from its logo, which was last changed 30 years ago. "It was a decision taken in the light of the RAC's new position – which will last for the next century," said Neil Johnson, the organisation's chief executive.

Asked if this meant the organisation envisaged the monarchy ending during the 21st century, Mr Johnson replied: "Not at all. I'm ab-

solutely certain that both the monarchy and the RAC are set to carry on."

"The Palace was consulted and I understand the Queen was very pleased with the result," said Mr Johnson.

Despite the changes, Prince Michael of Kent will remain the RAC's president.

The makeover will extend to the organisation's characteristic patrol vans. The RAC's tra-

ditional colours – red, white and blue – are to be shed in favour of a fluorescent orange and white stripes and chevrons which will cover the 1,500 patrol vehicles.

Other changes include a 22% non-callout discount after a successful pilot scheme earlier this year.

Members have £25 knocked off the annual subscription if they do not use the RAC's

roadside assistance service during the year.

The motoring organisation, which represents 6 million drivers, has gradually been moving away from lobbying for the motor car. Earlier this year, it produced a remarkably frank critique of the effect of the motor car and called for a

"massive investment in public transport".

At the time Mr Johnson started the motoring world by saying that the RAC "champions mobility, not the motorist".

Yesterday directors went fur-

ther. "We feel that some of the £24bn of taxes raised from the motorist should be used to improve transport in Britain," said David Worster, director of public affairs and a former head of safety at the Depart-

ment of Transport. "We have seen no major response from government in the last few years – which have seen increasing congestion and high pollution levels."

"Regrettably we have seen little in the manifesto than promises much for the future."

The new moves flew into flak from some hardline motorists' clubs.

"It is symptomatic of the fact that motoring organisations are losing sight of their members' concerns," said Brian Gregory, a spokesman for the Association of British Drivers, which claims to represent "thousands" of motoring enthusiasts.

"This has been compounded by a lot of false concerns spread by environmentalists."

Ministers from the 15 EU

Britain joins dirty men of Europe

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

The Government is among the laggards in European moves to make cars and their fuels less polluting, says Friends of the Earth. The green pressure group's opinion is based on a leaked confidential European Union report.

The document, summarising the negotiating positions of the 15 EU states, shows Britain has not joined a group of northern European countries including Germany and the Scandinavians, in pressing for the fastest rates of curbing fumes.

Instead Britain always takes the other side, joining with poorer southern European countries like Greece and Spain, with Ireland and sometimes with France in worrying about the economic damage done to the motor and oil industries and to consumers by too fast a rate of progress.

Friends of the Earth said the report "shatters John Major's claim that the Government's air quality policies make Britain the 'Clean Man of Europe'."

Roger Higham, FoE's trans-

port campaigner, said: "The UK is in the more reactionary group of countries. The Danes, Germans, Swedes, Austrians and Finns are the real clean men of Europe."

But a source inside the European Commission said Friends of the Earth was being unfair in portraying Britain as always siding with the poorer, southern European nations against the northerners. "The UK and France often act as the fulcrum between these two groups."

Ministers from the 15 EU

states are negotiating two new sets of laws proposed by the Commission covering improvements in fuel quality and car exhaust standards up to 2010.

They are due to meet in June, but before the two directives are finally agreed and adopted agreement also has to be reached with the European Parliament. So the directives are not expected to become law until well into next year.

In the cars directive the commission proposed exhaust standards to come into force in 2000, with still tougher standards for 2005 – but these would only be "indicative" and not firmly decided on until a review next year.

According to the document, seen by *The Independent*, Germany, Austria and the Scandinavian countries wanted the 2005 value to be set now, but Britain sided with Ireland, France, Spain and Italy in judging this "inappropriate".

DAILY POEM

Rooms

By Charlotte Mew

I remember rooms that have had their part
In the steady slowing down of the heart.
The room in Paris, the room at Geneva,
The little damp room with the seaweed smell,
And that ceaseless maddening sound of the tide –
Rooms where for good or for ill – things died.
But there is the room where we (two) lie dead.
Though every morning we seem to wake and might
just as well seem to sleep again.
As we shall somewhere in the other quiet,
dustier bed
Out there in the sun – in the rain.

Published in 1929, "Rooms" appears in *What Sappho Would Have Said: four centuries of love poems between women* (Hamish Hamilton, £16.99). Edited by Emma Donoghue, the anthology aims to represent "love between women in the broadest sense" and ranges in its 100-plus contributors from Aphra Behn to Carol Ann Duffy.

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179/13

Major errors
the same
excruciating
Englishness that
all who cross
his path.

David McKittrick
Ireland Correspondent

The Social Democratic and Labour Party launched its manifesto in Belfast yesterday, contending that support for the party represented the best chance of a post-election revival of the peace process.

The party leader John Hume laid claim to having shaped much of the political agenda of the past two decades, and appealed for a mandate for his

continuing efforts to bring about peace.

Taking as an example Mid-Ulster, where the SDLP is fighting the Rev Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Fein, he asked: "What is the choice in Mid-Ulster? Sectarianism and bigotry as represented by the DUP; violence and the killing of human beings as represented by Sinn Fein; or peace and agreement as represented by the SDLP? That is the choice."

The SDLP presently holds four of the 18 Northern Ireland seats. Three of these look safe for the party, but in West Belfast, always a marginal, Dr Joe Hendron faces a strong challenge from the Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams.

Another close contest between the parties is taking place in West Tyrone, a new constituency which has a nationalist majority.

Many SDLP members were worried by the Sinn Fein

performance in last year's elections to the Northern Ireland forum, when the republicans achieved a record 15.5 per cent of the vote.

SDLP workers say they are particularly targeting nationalists who last year switched to Sinn Fein in the hope of encouraging the peace process.

Mr Hume said extremists on both sides were promoting sectarianism in order to polarise opinion for electoral purposes.

He added: "The burning of

churches on both sides of our community is a dreadful and appalling act of sectarianism which offends the basic principles of the vast majority of people."

Many more people have to go to jail for the best part of their lives before that certainty is brought to fruition."

Mr Mallon was recently come under attack from republicans accusing him of being less enthusiastic about the peace process than his party leader. He responded yesterday: "I am not endless, declaring: 'If it becomes clear that the dialogue is not going to bring an end to violence, the SDLP will get on with the political talks.'

If the talks produced agree-

ment this should be put to the Irish people, north and south, for endorsement by referendum. If accepted, there would then be no conceivable justification for violence or the existence of the IRA, he said.

The SDLP leader added: "I would have thought it would be better to end their violence completely, join in that process, have an input to it, rather than be left out and have the Irish people come out on the one day and tell them they are totally opposed to what you are doing."

Hume offers 'best chance for peace'

THE INDEPENDENT
election '97

Old Etonian finds Fife a school of hard knicke

Douglas Fraser

People tend to be out working, so Jacob Rees-Mogg directs his efforts towards the unemployed, the elderly, single mothers and terrifying dogs, as he gamely lopes round a bleak Scottish housing estate on a steep learning curve.

Aged 27, and previously educated at Eton and Oxford, this City fund manager has enrolled at the school of hard knocks - Central Fife campus - to find out how to run a constituency campaign and offer himself up as a lamb for ritual political slaughter.

As a Conservative and Unionist candidate in the last area to have had a Communist MP, his tactic is to canvas for eight hours: "No Tory has been since before Clement Attlee been prime minister".

Mr Rees-Mogg cuts a mildly eccentric figure on the Leven housing estate, helped by a trusty Mercedes Estate and two friends who are up from London. Long and languid, and alarmingly like his journalist father, Lord William Rees-Mogg, he reasons quietly and earnestly with reluctant constituents. The candidate is



On the stump: Jacob Rees-Mogg campaigning in Fife Central - the last area to have had a Communist MP

slowed by the challenge of comprehending the broad Fife accent, while some voters struggle with his Etonian tones.

He refuses to accept his background as an issue. "Nobody says to Tony Blair in Sedgefield: 'You're Scottish, so what are you doing in an English constituency?' Or to Edwina Taylor in Southend. I suppose I'm Tedd Taylor in reverse. He has as much connection with Essex

as I do with Central Fife, but we're both campaigning on national issues that affect the whole country. I only had one person who shouted 'Go back to Cornwall', which was rather odd because I've no connection with Cornwall."

Five years ago, his predecessor took 17.5 per cent of the turnout, while Henry McLeish, currently Labour's Scottish campaign co-ordinator, won on

just about 50 per cent, double the Scottish Nationalist vote. If it looks bad for Mr Rees-Mogg, then consider the 7 per cent the Liberal Democrats took last time, despite the fact that Menzies Campbell holds the neighbouring seat for them.

Success, says Mr Rees-Mogg, must ultimately be measured by whether you win the seat or not.

But he is realistic about the impossible odds. Bearing an ex-

travagant rosette proclaiming "No Tartan Tax", he is particularly keen to argue the case for keeping sovereignty in Westminster and out of Edinburgh or Brussels. He is one Tory candidate who will not vote for a single European currency, whatever the result of the talks.

Everyone asks if this is a dry run for a safer seat next time, he says. But they all get short shrift. "I don't see this automatic

progression. I don't think any of the candidates who have stood in this seat since it was created in 1983 have gone on to stand again. I'm sure none have gone on to be elected. I'll wait and see. If I lose my deposit or something, I don't think anyone would want me to do it again, so it's not just a question of whether I want to do it. And obviously, if I'm elected here I'd stand again."

His name cuts little ice with readers of the *Glenrothes Gazette*. "If you look at name recognition, only 5 per cent know who Michael Heseltine is. Only 1 or 2 per cent will know who Rees-Mogg is, if that, though I had one lady recently who thought all politicians were pretty dreadful but she always reads my father's articles."

Rees-Mogg the Elder was a Tory candidate at a tender age and against the odds.

He fought a Durham mining seat in the 1950s before taking to journalism, and offered enthusiastic support for the stand in Central Fife: "For him, as for me, it was an invaluable thing to do because of what you learn about part of the country and people you otherwise might not come into contact with."

Fringe figures toss spanner in the democratic works

John Rentoul and Tony Heath

Among the record 3,717 candidates standing in this election, there is a bumper crop of oddballs, jokers and snook-cookers. Scrutiny of the lists published yesterday also revealed a handful of "spoiler" candidates using party names similar to the main parties.

Rod Richards, the Conservative former Welsh Office minister standing in Clwyd West, faces a challenge from a Rod Richard, describing himself as the "Conservative Party Candidate". Without the final "e" Mr Richard's name will appear before Mr Richards' on the ballot paper. The stunni could help hand the seat to Labour, which needs a 9 per cent swing to win.

Sir Nicholas Lyell, the Attorney General, saw off in the courts an attempt by a local businessman to change his name to "Sir Nicholas Lyell" and stand against him in Bedfordshire North East. But he still faces Frank Foley, who will be described as "Conservative Candidate" and who will precede him on the ballot paper.

Meanwhile, Labour faces trouble of its own from two "New Labour" candidates. In ultra-marginal Gravesend, Anthony Leyshon has carried out his threat to stand as the "New Labour Party Candidate" in protest at the decision to allow Tory defector Alan Howarth to stand as a Labour candidate. Alun Michael, a Labour home affairs spokesman, also faces a "New Labour"

challenger in his safe Cardiff South and Penarth seat.

In North Wales, a rogue Liberal Democrat candidate threatens to undermine the party's chances of winning the three-way marginal Conway seat. Richard Bradley, understood to be a former employee of the party in London, lodged papers describing himself as Liberal Democrat. The more angered party officials who claimed it was a deliberate attempt to damage the chances of the official candidate, the Rev Roger Roberts.

The issue of potentially misleading party labels was tested at the 1994 Euro-elections, when there were several "Conervative" candidates and two "Liberal Democrats". One of the Liberal Democrats won

more than 10,000 votes in Devon and East Plymouth.

A legal challenge to the result by the Liberal Democrats failed, and the court confirmed that the law on party labels was weak. The election administrator for Totton seems to have advised Martin Bell against the use of the "anti-corruption" law, rather than electoral law.

Other candidates include former drug smuggler Howard Marks, who is standing in Southampton Test, a Labour target, for the Legalise Cannabis Party, and Gary Glitter who is standing in Cornwall. Entertainer Freddie Zapp, changed his name by deed poll to fight the marginal Tory seat of Falmouth and Camborne for the Monster Raving Loony Party.

HOW I WILL VOTE: NICHOLAS PARSONS

'Ashdown has been very fair in not entering this slanging match'

How will you vote?
Liberal Democrat

Why? Well, I've been a Liberal all my life, since my university days. I've stuck throughout my life to the Liberal cause and Liberal party and now am a Liberal Democrat.

I think that Paddy Ashdown and the leading liberals [are] the most straightforward and honest of the politicians. They're not engaging in the party political slanging match that's going on, and trying to go into a personality tirade against each other.

What issues are important to you? I think the most important thing is education. I was rector of St Andrews University for three years, and I became very involved in the academic and educational world. I recognise the value of education and that's why I admire very much Paddy Ashdown's pledge to



put a penny on income tax in order to make sure that the educational standards are improved. I think every young person should be given all available opportunities, and I'm sure every parent would agree to put a penny on their income tax without hesitation to safeguard their children's future.

Which politicians do you admire? Well at the moment I like the leading members of the Liberal Democrats. I think that Pad-

dy Ashdown has been very fair and intelligent, in the way he has not gone in for this political slanging match. There are some very bright people in the Lib Dems such as Charles Kennedy and Menzies Campbell. If there was a close finish or hung parliament, I would like to see the Liberal Democrats invited into a coalition. This would ensure the extreme policies of either party were modified and we would have consensus politics. Coalitions can work.

This is not the way that a democracy should work. The advantage of a third party, especially a liberal party in third place, is that it would act as a counterbalance to one of the two major parties who have been fighting it back and forth over the last 40 years. Proportional representation is the fairest way to count votes.

Interview by Sam Coates

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Parties keep tight rein on cyberspace debate

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

The topic was Europe, the venue was the Internet, and the language was blunt. "Don't try to hide behind any posh sounding snoot-nosed expressions, you pompos windbag," said the message. Phew. Was John Major using the information superhighway to finally get tough with the Euro-sceptics?

In fact, no. That was part of the unfettered debate that Internet users are carrying on about the election in discussion areas known as "newsgroups".

Even though politicians have been happy to talk about how important the global network of the Internet will be to our future economic development, they show great reluctance to get involved in the real cut-and-thrust with potential voters.

Just as on the streets, where soundbites and choreographed walkabouts rule the day, on the Internet the parties are stage-managing everything, and leaving nothing to chance.

Most of the parties fielding candidates in the general election – from the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats through to Plaid Cymru, the Communist Party and Scottish Greens – are pushing their

manifestos via Web sites on the global network.

But that is the static part of the Conservative's site (at <http://www.conservative-party.org.uk/>), which claims to have 16,000 visitors per week – with about 80 per cent coming from the UK – actually echoes its physical adverts. The election front page declares, "A Choice of Two Futures".

But despite every indication that internal opposition to the single currency is the topic

they are emphatically not.

The Conservatives' site (at <http://www.labourwin97.org.uk/>) has received 1.25 million "hits" since its launch on March 20 – a splendidly misleading statistic, as one person's viewing of a page can generate hundreds of "hits" (which are requests by the user's computer to see a small file on the Labour site).

Judging by the structure of most occupying the Tories (if not the voters), its only mention comes as the 25th of the Tories' 25 pledges – which appear in an animated sequence taking 10 seconds each.

You could sit watching the screen for four minutes without finding out what policy, if any, the Tories have on the matter. And as for the existence of Euro-sceptics – well, perish the thought.

The Labour Party, meanwhile, is claiming that its election site (at <http://www.labourwin97.org.uk/>) has had between 62,500 and 125,000 visitors.

This would be in line with the other two parties: the Liberal Democrats said that their site (<http://www.libdems.org.uk/>) has about 4,000 visitors daily, with 70 per cent of those coming from the UK.



Spreading the word: The Deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, leaving the Brick Lane mosque in London's East End after a visit there yesterday with the Conservative candidate for Bethnal Green and Bow, Kabir Choudhury (front right)

Photograph: Andrew Buurma

Strong criticism by Brown suggests policies of third party are gathering support

Tax-and-spend promises earn Lib Dems a flattering attack

Anthony Bevins
Political Editor

Labour yesterday delivered a dramatically tough attack on the Liberal Democrats' tax and spending policies – prompting a suspicion that Paddy Ashdown's party is making campaign hay.

At his daily press conference, Mr Ashdown underlined the Liberal Democrat promise to offer clear, costed commitments in return for "modest, targeted taxes".

Citing the example of cuts in class sizes or shortened waiting lists for hospital treatment, he said: "We believe people are prepared to pay a little more, so long as they know the money will be well spent."

Baroness Williams – the former Labour cabinet minister and one of the Social Democrats' founding Gang of Four – told the press conference that the tax message was getting across to the voters.

Fresh from a campaign tour, she reported: "It is clear that our simple message on tax... is very popular." As for Labour, she said: "There was a quite extraordinary level of bewilderment about what they stood for."

"It is a kind of Cheshire cat campaign where there is nothing left at the end but the smile."

"It is not that they don't think Labour stands for social justice any more, it is that they don't know what it stands for... There is a very strong sense that Labour has given words

of support to all the things we both agree upon, but that is not accompanied by any clear commitment of any kind to finance it."

Whether Labour was stung by that attack, or whether it is sensitive to constituency reports of a growing support for the Liberal Democrats, Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, yesterday delivered a flattering, strong criticism of the party at Labour's press conference.

"I think it is about time that the Liberal Democrats who say that they want honesty about finance, honestly told us how all their spending commitments are to be paid for," he said.

Mr Brown then read out a lengthy list of Liberal Democ-

rat spending commitments, from free eye and dental checks through to an increase of 3,000 in the number of police officers, adding: "And the Liberals try tell us this can be paid for at 45p a week."

"I ask you, 'Do their sums add up? Where is the money going to come from?'" The only reason they can get away with these spending commitments, that are completely uncrossed, is because nobody thinks they are going to be elected. They are being completely dishonest in their claims."

Tony Blair, the Labour leader, yesterday went out of his way to urge reporters to examine the Liberal Democrat claims, saying: "The Liberal Democrat proposals, particu-

larly on taxation, bear a little scrutiny."

The Liberal Democrat claim about a cost of 45p a week relates specifically to the proposal to raise the rate of income tax by a penny, to help pay for the £2bn-a-year education investment plan.

The party has also listed a number of other tax increases and spending cuts to fund its programme. And the Liberal Democrats are quite specific in saying that free eye and dental checks, and a freeze on prescription charges, would be more than covered by an extra 5p tax on a pack of cigarettes, and an extension of employers' national insurance contributions to taxable benefits in kind.

Donald Macmillan, page 19

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Donald Macmillan, page 19

Barrie Clement

Paddy Ashdown last night was able to emulate a retired party leader with the words: "We are a grandfather."

Mr Ashdown, 56, heard that his daughter Kate had given birth to a baby boy.

Mr Ashdown referred to the "sad spectacle" of the Prime Minister being forced to dedicate the whole of a party political broadcast on Wednesday night to rebels in his own party.

Mr Ashdown said the Conservatives had become two parties. "In one Tory party, the few left who understand that Britain's future lies in Europe. In the other Tory party, the kind of people whose idea of a European policy is to shout loud-

ers personally, he offered the Prime Minister his pity instead.

The increasingly buoyant Liberal Democrat leader said he felt "genuinely sorry" for John Major. He was a decent man trying desperately to lead an "impossible party" riven with turmoil over Europe.

In the teeth of ministerial dissent and open revolt among candidates, Mr Major urged support for his "negotiate and then decide" policy on a single currency.

Mr Ashdown said the broadcast was not targeted at 56 million people, nor even the critical "swing" voters in marginal seats, but at 600 Tory MPs.

The Liberal Democrat leader was in confident mood in the wake of national polls showing growing support for his party and the results of private surveys in Tory marginal constituencies where Liberal Democrats believe they are closing the gap.

Mr Ashdown said the Conservatives had become two parties. "In one Tory party, the few left who understand that Britain's future lies in Europe. In the other Tory party, the kind of people whose idea of a European policy is to shout loud-

er in English. They are hopelessly divided. They are weakly led." The internal strife in the Conservative party had become the foreign policy of the British government, he said.

The hustings earlier in the day took on the air of a musical comedy as the Ashdown battle bus arrived at the shopping precinct in the middle of Hereford.

While the Australian tenor Richard Winsborough rendered his "songs of passion", Mr Ashdown encountered his first heckler of the campaign.

Clive Easton, the 49-year-old Referendum Party candidate for the constituency, pursued Mr Ashdown round the shopping centre pleading for a dialogue in the middle of Hereford.

In the teeth of ministerial dissent and open revolt among candidates, Mr Major urged support for his "negotiate and then decide" policy on a single currency.

on Europe. Mr Easton, however, found his way barred by Liberal Democrat heavies, one of them all of 5ft 10in.

To the strains of "Vienna City of My Dreams", Mr Easton, a British Airways 747 captain on unpaid leave, unleashed his most potent invective: "Can I please have a minute of your time?"

Eventually the agitated Mr Easton – with the help of the media – managed to speak to Mr Ashdown, who directed the Europhobe to debate the issue with the Liberal Democrat candidate in Hereford.

Mr Ashdown then swept off, leaving the lone heckler listening to the plaintive notes of "O Sole Mio".

To enter the discussion, go to our election web site, at <http://www.virgin.net/independent97/>

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Parties are hoping their hard work with young voters will help rout the group's traditional apathy

Labour targets first-time voters

Sam Coates

Things can only get better... so long as you vote. That was the message coming from the Labour Party's youth spokeswoman Mo Mowlam yesterday. She was launching a drive to try and motivate first time voters into casting their mark in this election.

According to Ms Mowlam, the problem with young people is not that they don't care about politics, but that they are disillusioned, disaffected and "don't feel a great identity with the political process or some of our institutions".

In order to combat this, the party have launched a new video for first-time voters, aimed at mobilising some of the 3,000 first-timers in each constituency.

There was a high degree of apathy in 1992 with 50 per cent (more than 2.5 million) of young people failing to vote.

Political parties are not the only ones trying to encourage young people to vote in this year's election.

James Palumbo, the owner of the Ministry of Sound - who has leased a car to Peter Mandelson for the duration of the campaign - has started a "Use Your Vote" campaign to encourage first timers to re-enter into the political process. Similarly, the "Rock the Vote" campaign, fronted by the likes of comedians Eddie Izzard and Joe Brand, to re-encourage the disaffected, boasts it has added almost half a million young people to the electoral register.

The video makes no attempt to put across a party political viewpoint, encouraging the viewer to vote Labour - indeed there is even a brief glimpse of

John Major at one point. It shows young people from all sections of the community gathering and heading off to a polling booth together.

As the virgin voters arrive, we see what they have to do in order to cast their vote right the way through to one of them marking a cross on his ballot paper. Although the viewer does not get to see which candidate he votes for, his pen heads in the general direction of the Labour candidate's name.

Even though this video is careful to appear apolitical, Labour are clearly trying to encourage impressionable first timers to vote for them.

All voters between the ages of 18 and 23 have spent most, if not all, of their lives under a Conservative Party government. As a result, Labour's "Time for a Change" strategy has particular resonance with this sector of society.

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Act of faith: Nalan Kana pitching to fellow pupils for the Forgotten Ignored Outrageous party at the Young Vic

Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

Teens show Major the stage door

Kim Sengupta

So, Labour is out of the wilderness years. The pollsters can pat themselves on the back. Tony Blair won by a landslide. He will be the one leading the Britain into a new millennium.

That was the result of the election at the Young Vic in London, in a poll of 200 schoolchildren, aged 13 to 16. The exercise in sounding out voters of the future involved a mock campaign by the three main parties and a production of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*.

The debate was colourful and sometimes dirty. The party leaders smiled and offered promises, spin doctors scowled, while cynical journalists sniped from the sidelines.

At the end it was a disaster for the Tories. They picked up only 10 per cent of the votes, beaten into second place by the Liberal Democrats with 15 per cent. Labour swept in with a massive 75 per cent.

The groundbreaking series on children and politics, called Revolution, was organised by the production company Northen Stage. The pupils are encouraged to participate in all aspects of an impending election. Yesterday they came from three schools, the George Orwell in north London; and Lilian Baylis and Bishop Thomas Grant, both in south London.

Small groups formed three parties. Me Myself Alone (modelled on the Conservatives), Us Together Ourselves (Labour) and Forgotten Ignored Outrageous (Lib Dems). There were also organisations from both sides of employment - the National Business Executive and Union of Workers, and two newspapers roughly modelled on the Sun and The Independent.

Yesterday's was a single issue election, on a subject close to the hearts of Messrs Howard and Straw - the problem of juvenile crime.

An MMA government committed to law and order has introduced a series of draconian laws, including imprisoning of persistent truants, night-time curfew, electronic tagging and tattooing the word "Criminal" on their foreheads. It has then gone to the country.

The tabloid newspaper newspaper and its staff, whose alleged characteristics were "gossip, celebrities and Royals, dishing the dirt and never letting facts get in the way of the story", were fervent propagandists for the government.

The worthy broadsheet, "abhorring sensationalism, publishing all the facts and printing only news that matter", opposed it.

After discussing the issues involved, the respective groups presented their arguments on the Young Vic stage. The heckling from the populace was strident. "But", as one teacher remarked, "no worse than you see on the telly late night Commons debates, when they have just come out of the bars".

The Government said their aim was simply to "protect the innocent by punishing the guilty" and "all right-thinking kids should support it". The Opposition called this a lot of things, but among those printable was: "They have not got a clue, they should be spending more on education rather than locking them up." The Lib Dems liked the new laws to the Nazis' treatment of the Jews.

After his party's defeat, the outgoing Prime Minister, Tony Blair, 15, from Bishop Thomas, said he was contemplating a career in politics. But he added: "I don't think I could bring myself to vote Tory. If I had the vote now, I would vote Liberal Democrat."

Compiled by Ben Summers

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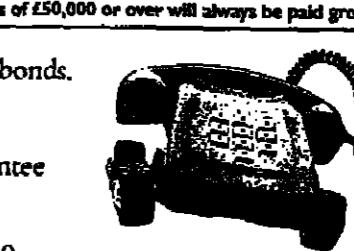
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QUOTES OF THE DAY

It's the total collapse of a once stout party. It's an extraordinary abdication of governmental responsibility - Liberal Democrat Alex Carlisle on the Tories' attitude to EMU

If you vote Tory on May 1, what Conservative Party are you getting? - Tony Blair

Here was a decent, honourable man trying to lead an impossible, rebellious, shattered and split party - Paddy Ashdown on John Major's Party Political Broadcast

Chancellor Kohl and President Chirac are far too astute and experienced. They would eat Mr Blair for breakfast and digest him for lunch - Malcolm Rifkind, Foreign Secretary

We are not the party of the fat cats, but we are the party of making sure we will not put up taxes - Tony Blair

Frankly pathetic - Sandy Macara, BMA chairman, on Labour's pledge to cut NHS bureaucracy by £100m and spend it on patient care

An excellent way of solving a very difficult problem ... The great majority don't want to go any further into Europe - Sir Teddy Taylor on the idea of a free vote

I look forward to her instant dismissal as a sign of strong leadership in the Shadow Cabinet - John Major on Clare Short

We know what the general British public think because we have been going around getting candidates nominations and we have been getting a friendly reception in almost every house that we call - John Tyndall, BNP leader

It's not a sackable offence to make a mistake and say something you perhaps would prefer not to have said - Malcolm Rifkind on ministers John Horam and James Paine

international

Russian press facing threat to free speech

Phil Reeves
Moscow

Press freedom in post-Soviet Russia has always been a half-hearted affair, as Boris Yeltsin proved when he brazenly manipulated the media to secure his election victory last year. Now, Moscow is in the throes of an intense debate over fears that, after shedding the yoke of oppressive state control under the Soviet Union, the media is seeing its new freedoms wither away entirely.

Among the issues under scrutiny is whether the airwaves and newspapers are falling into the hands of a cor-

porate élite who have close ties with the Kremlin, and want to use the media to advance their common interests.

Concern is also focusing on attempts in parliament to tighten restrictions on the media. Members of Russia's Duma, or lower house of parliament, recently banned one of Russia's big three television companies, ORT, from covering its sessions, after accusing it of bias.

Although they had to back down after the station went to court, this week they launched a broader offensive, voting overwhelmingly to impose strict limits on the coverage of their debates, after complaining that

the television companies concentrate unfairly on their worst moments – notably, slanging matches and fist-fights.

The cameras are to be operated by the in-house press service, which will select footage to be distributed to broadcasters. Scenes such as the infamous brawl between the ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky and a female member of parliament will, if parliament's will prevails, no longer be broadcast.

But a deeper trend is at work, an offshoot of Mr Yeltsin's re-election campaign which was widely acknowledged as a masterpiece in media control, turning rock-bottom ratings

into a resounding victory last July. His Communists and nationalist opponents were squeezed off the air, often by journalists who were willing to shelve concerns about free speech to ensure their defeat.

To Russia's top business executives and bankers, it was an object lesson in the importance of a media power base. Since then, they have been buying strategic stakes in newspapers and television companies.

Although the principle is the same as the commercial media in the West, there are differences unlike their American and European counterparts, the interests of Russia's media

owners mesh more closely with those of the government. The two entities are sometimes almost inseparable.

There are plenty of examples. Recently Gazprom – the vast gas monopoly with close ties to the Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, its former boss – bought a 30 per cent stake in NTV, another major television channel. The station is controlled by Vladimir Gusinsky, one of a coterie of Moscow business who poured money and resources into the Yeltsin campaign.

Boris Berezovsky, another multi-millionaire entrepreneur from the same camp, was rewarded for his loyalty by being made deputy secretary of the Security Council. He continues to control the influential *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Ogonyok* magazine. He also has a 16 per cent slice of ORT television, which he used to run.

In the past he has been frank about his tactics. "By creating a powerful means of influencing society, we are supporting the continuation of economic policy," he told an interviewer last year. It was, he said, "a union of state and capital". He has since demonstrated how it works: when *Ogonyok* journalists published an article which embarrassed Mr Chernomyrdin, Mr

Berezovsky cut their pay. Few observers doubt that the media moguls will do the same around when they need to.

Critics quote the case this month involving *Izvestia* newspaper. It reprinted a story from *Le Monde* alleging that Mr Chernomyrdin had a personal fortune of \$5bn (£3bn). One of *Izvestia*'s major shareholders, the oil giant Lukoil, was so infuriated by the claim that it warned that it might sell its 40 per cent stake as a protest.

In Moscow (AP) – just three weeks after being named first deputy prime minister, a young reformer has dashed past his rivals to become Russia's most trusted politician, according to a nationwide poll released yesterday.

Boris Nemtsov, the 37-year-old former governor of Nizhny Novgorod, was rated most trustworthy by 47 percent of respondents to a poll by the Russian Independent Institute for Social and National Problems (RIISNP).

Some 20 per cent said they didn't trust him and the rest were undecided, according to the poll, conducted in the first week of April. This showed a significant jump from the institute's last poll in December, in which only 34 per cent of respondents said they trusted him.

Kohl draws pledge from Yeltsin to sign Nato treaty

Imre Karacs
Bonn

Russia will sign up for a new era of partnership with Nato, although it still has strong reservations about the Western alliance's plans to incorporate former Warsaw Pact states, Boris Yeltsin announced yesterday.

After a four-hour discussion with German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, President Yeltsin said many of the obstacles in the way of closer ties had been removed. "A treaty will be signed on 27 May between Russia and Nato," he said.

His statement was in sharp contrast to official Russian utterances in the last few days, which had held the partnership hostage to the ongoing row about Nato expansion.

Russia and Nato are due to sign an agreement in Paris next month, formalising Moscow's new friendly role in European security.

Officials accompanying Mr Yeltsin to Germany had hinted at last-minute difficulties. "If the treaty is not binding and concrete on military matters, then there would scarcely be any point for Russia to sign such a document," declared Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the President's spokesman, on the eve of the meeting with Mr Kohl.

After yesterday's encounter, however, it was all sweetness and light.

Mr Kohl said that "Ninety per cent of questions" had been settled, and he was convinced the remaining 10 per cent would be cleared up by the time of the Paris summit. Although the Chancellor did not elaborate on the 10 per cent, Mr Yeltsin said



• Russia will not tolerate any new member state so close to its frontier becoming a Nato arsenal •

he was categorically opposed to Nato weaponry, whether it was nuclear or conventional, spilling over into the former Soviet block countries which are about to be co-opted into Nato. If there is no linkage between Russia's treaty with Nato and the problems vexing Nato expansion, then the West has two more months to find a solution which will accommodate Moscow.

At the end of July the Alliance is expected to issue formal invitations to Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. Only one of these, Poland, borders on Russian territory, but Moscow is not prepared to tolerate any new member so close

to its frontiers becoming a major Nato arsenal, let alone a nuclear base.

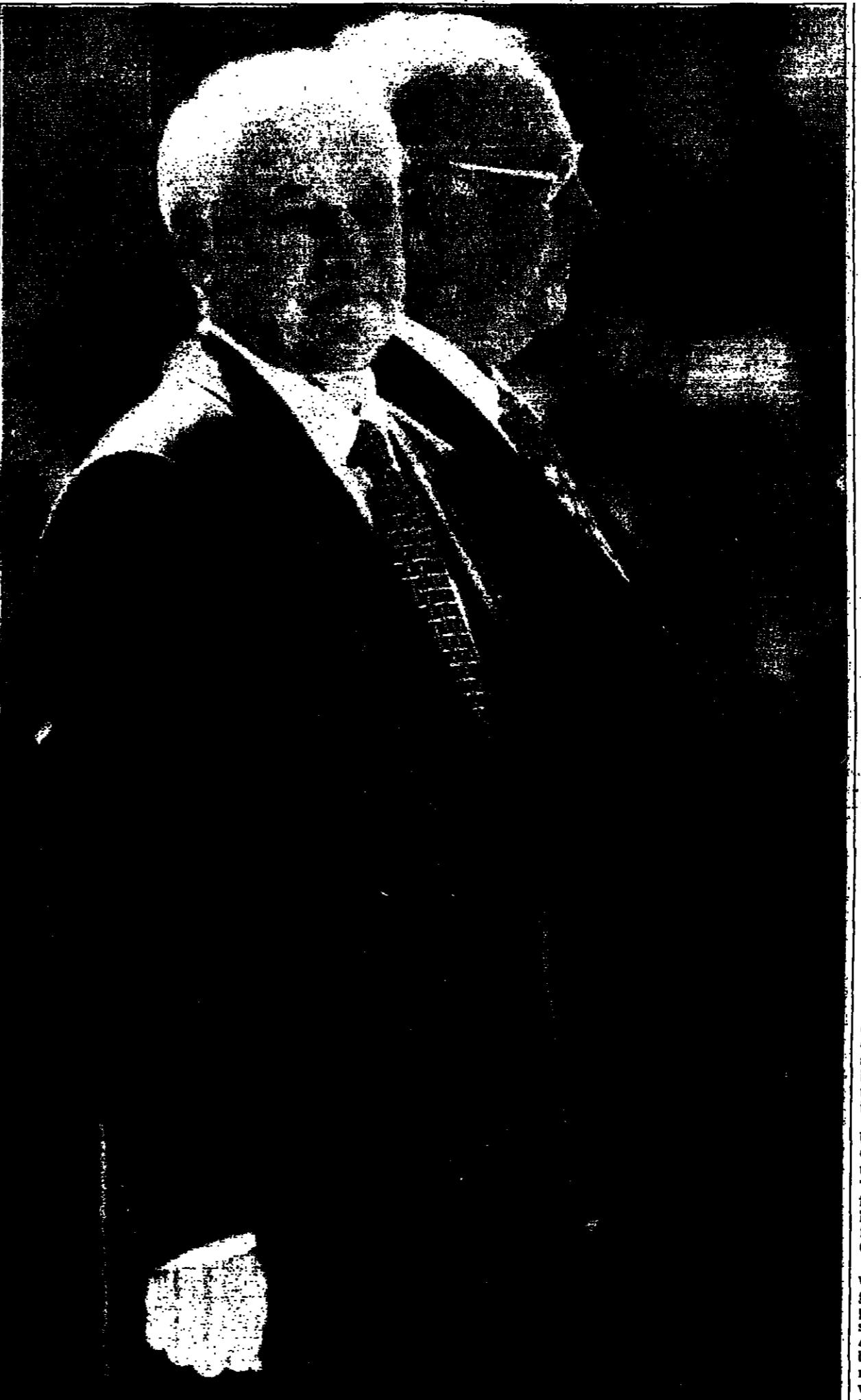
How Nato satisfies these objections without appearing to cave in to Russian pressure is largely up to the deft handling of the German Chancellor, who appears to enjoy the full confidence of his Russian counterpart.

Mr Yeltsin was fulsome in praise for "my friend Helmut" and the support he had provided in the Nato negotiations, prompting the Chancellor at one point to draw attention to Germany's full commitment to Nato. He promised to help his Kremlin friend, but said he would not play the role of interpreter.

The meeting in Baden-Baden, a town full of well-heeled pensioners recovering from debilitating illnesses, was the fifth between the two men in just over a year. When Mr Yeltsin fell ill, the Chancellor sent a doctor to Moscow.

Yesterday, the Russian President repaid the compliment by presenting his German chum with the captured personal archives of Walther Rathenau, the German foreign minister who signed the peace of Rapallo with Russia.

Mr Yeltsin was invited to Germany to receive the "Man of the Year" prize, awarded to him by the German media last year. He could not receive it as scheduled last November because of his heart surgery. A German human rights group, the Society for Threatened Peoples, said the heavy casualties in the Chechnya war and the death under fire of journalists there meant it was a "mockery" to give Mr Yeltsin the prize.



Shoulder to shoulder: Yeltsin and Kohl standing for their national anthems at Baden-Baden, where the German Chancellor ironed out Russia's remaining worries about Nato expansion

German status on offer to guest children

Imre Karacs

The principle of Germanness residing in the genes is about to become extinct as the Bonn government prepares to naturalise hundreds of thousands of "foreign" children overnight.

After 10 years of discussions, the coalition parties have finally struck a compromise which will allow the children of immigrants to obtain German passports, although their parents will continue to languish in "guest" status.

Under the current law, which dates back to 1913, German nationality is inherited, irrespective of birthplace. As a result, millions of German descendants in Eastern Europe enjoy the right to German citizenship, however tenuous their links to the Fatherland.

At the same time, citizenship until now has been denied to a generation of "guests" and "foreigners" who were born and raised on German soil and educated in German schools. Earlier this year, the government even imposed travel restrictions on children of immigrants from Turkey and North Africa.

Helmut Kohl's solution is to grant German passports to children as they reach school age. Unlike the rest of the population, they will be allowed to hold dual citizenship as minors, but will have to make a choice when they reach maturity.

The government will nevertheless continue to insist that "Germany is not a country of immigration". Immigrant quotas will be further tightened and the bureaucratic hurdles blocking naturalisation are set to remain the most formidable in the Western world.

Between 3 million and 7 million "non-Germans" live in Germany. Several hundred thousand second-generation "immigrants" are set to benefit from the new law, which liberals hope will make it easier for the first generation to adopt German citizenship.

But immigrant organisations warn it may take another generation for the state and its present citizens to accept dark-skinned Germans as their own. Although xenophobic attacks have abated in recent years, many Germans remain convinced that Muslims represent a threat to the Christian character of society, and at least one government minister is on record deplored multi-culturalism.

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The rate is variable throughout the term and the APR is a variable and is calculated on the assumption that the demanded repayment rate will apply for the full term of the loan. However, the first year of the Society's prevailing standard variable mortgage rate will be 20.00%. The Society's prevailing variable rate for loans of £10,000 or less for 10 years will be 9.00% and for amounts over £10,000, 10 years, or amounts only loans, an interest rate of 4.29% APR. An arrangement fee of £100 over 25 years reduces the amount of interest by 4.29%. The Society's prevailing standard variable mortgage rate for loans of £10,000 or less for 10 years will be 9.00% and for amounts over £10,000, 10 years, or amounts only loans, an interest rate of 4.29% APR. An arrangement fee of £100 over 25 years reduces the amount of interest by 4.29%. 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peech

German
status
on offer
to gues
children

Gingrich bailed out by Dole in \$300,000 loan deal

Mary Dejevsky

Washington
The Republican Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, astonished his supporters and opponents alike yesterday with the announcement that he would pay a controversial \$300,000 fine with a loan from the Republicans' failed presidential candidate, Bob Dole.

In an unscheduled address to the House yesterday morning, shortly after the payment arrangements had been made public, Mr Gingrich said he had a "moral obligation" to pay the money from personal – as opposed to campaign or other – funds

and had "therefore arranged to borrow the money and pay it back".

Whether and how the fine would be paid has grown into an issue that appeared increasingly to threaten Mr Gingrich's position as Speaker and his whole political future.

Reports that Mr Gingrich was finalising the terms of a personal loan had been buzzing for several days, but the announcement that the loan was to come from Mr Dole came out of the blue.

Under the arrangement made public yesterday, the loan is for eight years and granted directly to Mr Gingrich, who will take personal responsibility for its repayment. In-

terest will be calculated at 10 per cent, 1.5 per cent above the base rate, but no payments will be required until the year 2002, the year in which Mr Gingrich has pledged to surrender the post of Speaker.

Mr Gingrich is also required to take out life insurance sufficient to cover repayment and interest.

He made his statement to a packed House of Representatives,

with his wife, Marianne – to whom he paid generous tribute – sitting in the gallery.

It had been reported that most of the couple's assets were registered in Mrs Gingrich's name and that she

had strongly opposed paying the fine

from personal funds. Acknowledging the difficulty, Mr Gingrich said his family's lives had been "torpedoed" by the decision.

The \$300,000 fine, described as a "penalty", was imposed on Mr Gingrich after he admitted misinforming – unwittingly, he insists – the House of Representatives ethics committee about payments he had received, tax-free, for a book advance and lectures.

The imposition of the fine was con-

troversial. Many Republicans saw it as politically motivated; others questioned how far a politician should be forced to use his own money to pay a penal-

y not imposed by a court of law.

There was general agreement, however, that Mr Gingrich's continued failure to pay, by whatever means, had become a liability to his position as speaker, and his career.

The fine was levied in January, after

Mr Gingrich admitted breaching House rules by sending to the ethics committee two lawyers' letters "in my name and over my signature" that were inaccurate.

In a statement explaining his of-

fer to Mr Gingrich, Mr Dole said yes-

terday that he considered the loan

"not only an opportunity to support a friend, but a long-term investment in the future of our party".

Mr Dole is a wealthy man com-

pared to Mr Gingrich. He has re-

cently returned to legal practice, and

earned half a million dollars just from

appearing in one credit card adver-

tisement.

Mr Dole's action was seen as scal-

ing a reconciliation between the

two men, who have not always been

on good terms.

Some Republicans persisted in

their belief that Mr Gingrich should

not have agreed to pay the fine from

personal funds.

They continued to argue that the charges against the Speaker had been essentially political, and

that his agreement to foot the bill

personally as setting a dangerous

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Building bridges: UK business chiefs attempt to drum up business in North Korea as civil unrest flares in the South

British firms go for the hard sell in last Stalinist state

Teresa Poole
Peking

One of this year's least likely business missions starts tomorrow when members of the British Chamber of Commerce in China set off for North Korea, the world's last Stalinist state.

Representatives of 10 companies will spend five days visiting the capital, Pyongyang, and the Rajin Sonbong special economic zone in search of an elusive animal - a viable business opportunity in a country where most of the population no longer has enough to eat.

Among the companies in the BCCC group are Jardine Fleming, Airbus, ING Bank, the business services arm of Reuters, the lawyers Clifford Chance and a consultancy firm, Barey Burn.

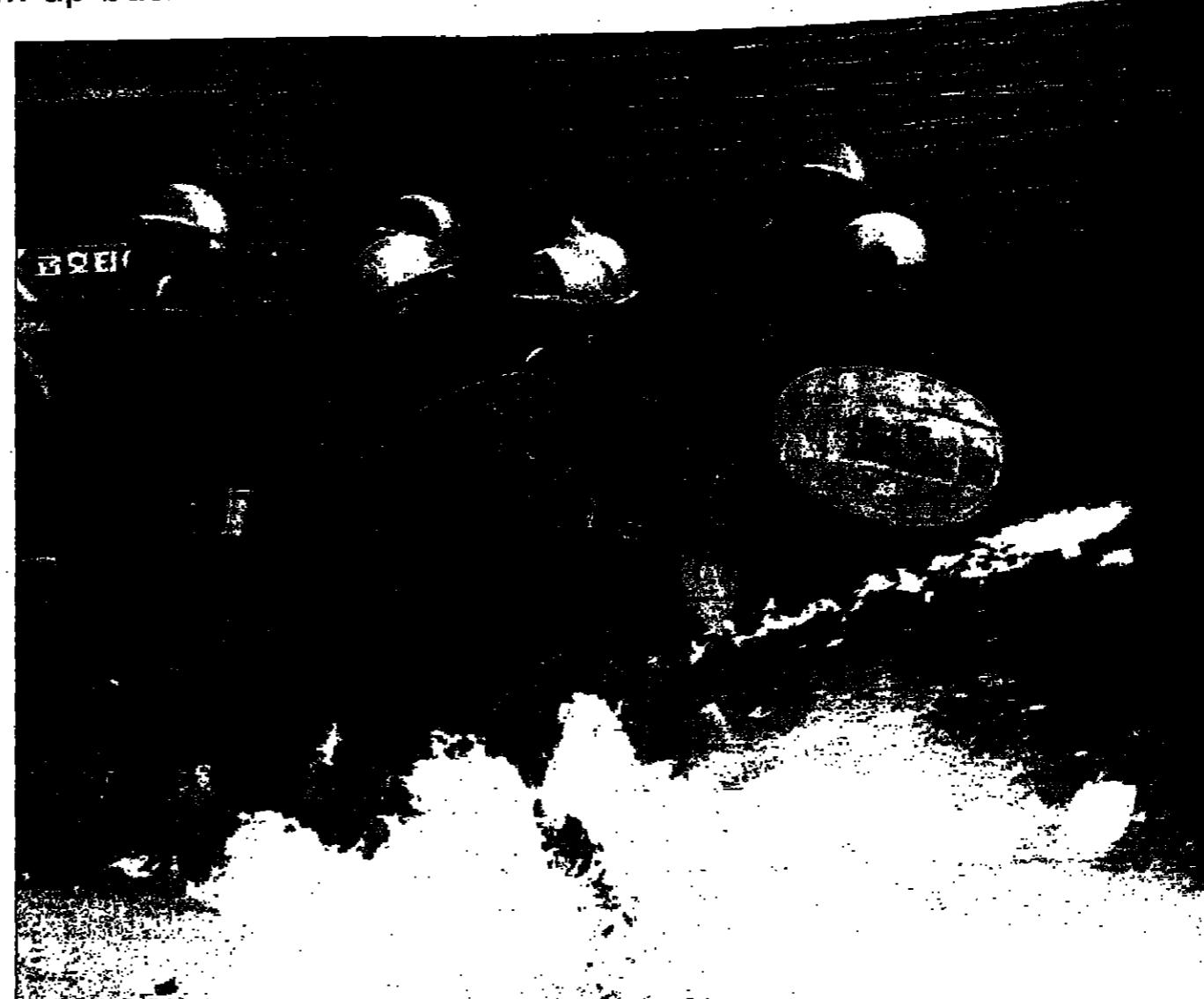
The business mission was organised by the Peking-based Koryo Group, one of the few companies which runs package tours into North Korea. Its British director, Josh Green, said: "The message from North Korea has always been that they are open for business. So now, like any other time, North Korea welcomes foreign business people." There was no difficulty arranging visas for the businessmen, but no British journalist was

allowed to accompany the group.

Although not connected, the business delegation comes just one month after the most senior British diplomatic visit to North Korea since 1950. David Coates, the head of the Far Eastern and Pacific Department of the Foreign Office, spent four days in Pyongyang. "We have naturally read about the critical food condition and want to find out more," said Mr Williams.

The host for the visit will be the Korean Committee for the Promotion of External Economic Co-operation (CPEEC), which will provide briefings on the trade and investment opportunities in the Rajin Sonbong region and the rest of the country. Banking members of the delegation will talk to North Korean banks, and the team will visit the Sangwon Cement factory, and an exhibition of light industrial goods and minerals.

The focus of the briefings will be the Rajin Sonbong economic development zone in the north of the country, which is part of the wider Tumen River development project. After Pyongyang, the group will fly via Peking to China's border with North Korea and then on to Rajin Sonbong. Two further days will be spent on the Chinese side of the border.



Flashpoint: A firebomb engulfing the legs of a riot police officer yesterday as hundreds of students in Seoul demanded the arrest of Kim Hyun-Chul, the son of South Korean president Kim Young-Sam, for alleged fraud. Photograph: AFP

INDEPENDENT

ON SUNDAY

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The leader, his cognac and the starving hordes

Richard Lloyd Parry
Seoul

Hard information about North Korea is hard to come by, but in the last few weeks one thing has become increasingly certain: after two years of floods and economic stagnation, the country is on the verge of famine. An American congressman who visited this month saw peasants living off hot water and last year's cabbage leaves.

But one commodity at least is not in short supply: for all its economic distress, North Korea is still consuming a disproportionate amount of the world's finest cognac.

By global standards the quantities are not large, but they are remarkable for a country which last week became the subject of a \$126m (£77m) emergency food appeal by the United Nations.

In the first two months of this year alone, according to official French figures, cognac producers exported 200 litres to Pyongyang. In 1996, the total was 300 litres.

A spokesman for Hennessy confirmed that the company exports a range of brandies to North Korea, from the standard VSOP, which sells for about 280 francs (£30), to Richard Hennessy which costs 8000 francs (£350) a bottle. Since the first devastating round of floods in

1995, North Korea has spent 1,421,000 francs (£151,170) on high-quality French brandy.

In fact, cognac consumption appears to have increased as the economy has plunged - in 1995 French brandy exports were at eight of last year's. And here perhaps lies a clue to the cognac conundrum.

There is little doubt that the shipments are reserved for the most senior leaders of the Worker's Party, including the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong Il. Cognac is valued in Asia above all as a symbol of prestige. Bottles are given as presents to acquire influence and favour; and if the Dear Leader is giving away more bottles these days, it may be because he needs all the favours he can muster.

Among the biggest of many uncertainties in North Korea is the loyalty of the military. Since the death three years ago of his father, Kim Il Sung, the Dear Leader has made efforts to ingratiate himself with his armed forces.

Defectors have described the award of villas and luxury cars to key officers. Assuming that he doesn't drink it all himself, the Dear Leader's cognac is most likely to end up in the glasses of the military.

Far from representing blind extravagance, it may actually be an indicator of his increasing desperation.

significant shorts

Mobutu and rebel leader agree to talks

President Mobutu Sese Seko and the Zairean rebel leader Laurent Kabila have agreed in principle to meet to prepare the way for elections, UN envoy Mohamed Salimou said.

Mr Salimou and South African Deputy Foreign Minister Aziz Pahad said President Nelson Mandela had formally invited Mr Mobutu to meet Mr Kabila in South Africa "as early as possible". President Mandela met Mr Kabila on Wednesday in an attempt to persuade Mr Kabila to drop his insistence on Mr Mobutu's resignation, a government source said.

Reuters - Cape Town

June elections in Albania

Albania's rival political parties agreed to hold emergency parliamentary elections on 29 June, in an effort to resolve the countrywide crisis. The date was announced by Franz Vranitzky, sent by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to try and bridge differences between rival factions ahead of the elections. AP - Tirana

Former Israeli president dies

Chaim Herzog, Israel's longest-serving president, died yesterday, aged 78. Mr Herzog suffered heart failure after contracting pneumonia during a recent visit to the United States.

AP - Jerusalem
Obituary, page 20

Karadzic still an 'evil force'

The spokesman for Carl Bildt, the international High Representative to Bosnia, said that Radovan Karadzic, the former Bosnian Serb president indicted by the UN war crimes tribunal "remains a force of evil and intrigue which can only taint those personalities and those institutions of (the Serb republic) which continue to tolerate his activities."

Reuters - Sarajevo

in the South



Indicted or not, Netanyahu is already guilty

True friends of Israel ought to welcome the controversy that has engulfed Israel's prime minister, Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu. For two reasons. The first is the way the Netanyahu affair reminds us of Israeli freedom. It is a state in which the rule of law is held, still, in high regard. Journalists can and do dig and delve into the affairs of the highest in the land without fear of retribution. The same cannot be said of Israel's neighbours. In Lebanon, television is censored. In Egypt and Jordan the police possess none of that operational independence which has allowed them in Israel to investigate the innermost works of government. Syria is a repressive autocracy. If Mr Netanyahu falls as a result of an indictment, it ought to increase not diminish our admiration for the preservation of democratic reflexes in a society threatened from without by terrorism and from within by religious authoritarianism and fanaticism.

Mr Netanyahu's difficulties are welcome for another, less satisfying reason. They may lead to his eviction from the office of prime minister, and so to the possibility of a new start in the process of making peace with the Palestinians who – ineradicable fact of history and geography it is – inhabit the same quadrilateral formed of Phoenician plains, Judean hills and Jordan Valley. As a stabilisation exercise the Netanyahu "experiment" is not working. The

spiral of violence has lately turned upwards. The longer he stays in office, the less possible will be the eventual and necessary accommodation with Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian people which sooner or later must be achieved.

The condition of the state of Israel demands our British, special attention. We created it. Israel was the product of British resolve, first in the Balfour declaration, then, 30 years on, in the way Britain ended its (League of Nations) Mandate for Palestine. Successive British governments have taken Israel as a special friend. Israel's moral credit stood high with the British public. In the haze of sentiment, political change within Israel was less questioned than it might have been in other nations: the rise of Likud and the Israeli right was obscured by the consequences of its leader, Menachem Begin, going to Camp David and Cairo.

But the arrival of Mr Netanyahu represents generational change – Shimon Peres hanging, albeit by his fingertips, to the Labour-kibbutz-Golda Meier tradition. With Mr Netanyahu a new, indigenous political style has triumphed amid party fragmentation. Of course Mr Netanyahu has not been formally charged with anything. A journalistic investigation of the circumstances of the appointment of Roni Bar-On as attorney general led to the police inquiry, which the new attorney general has now to consider. (We

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British are in no position to make light of the ambiguities surrounding the role of law officers who are part judicial actors, part party politicians.)

The paradox in this affair is that Mr Netanyahu is accused of trying to win a plea-bargain for the leader of the Shas party in order to secure his assent to the withdrawal of Israeli troops from central Hebron. There will be many who would say such an operation would be justified – if it led to peace. But the failure of the Netanyahu regime has been that peace has not advanced. Withdrawal from Hebron has given no forward momentum to the

process. Instead, within weeks of leaving Hebron, Mr Netanyahu approved the go-ahead for the Har Homa construction project. In its aftermath the Hebron withdrawal itself starts to look less and less intelligible.

Some have claimed Mr Netanyahu is pursuing a grand project in which his aggressiveness makes sense. It is, in effect, to shake a mailed fist in the Palestinians' face, soften them up, make them more amenable to what Likud would like to offer – a kind of West Bank and Gaza bantustan, an enclave that falls well short of statehood. The objection to this is not that pejorative

notion "bantustan". The final shape of a Palestinian entity might well – given the facts of geography and Israel's legitimate security needs – fall short of a "state" with all the trappings of formal sovereignty. The real objection is that any and all conceivable Palestinian political entities will only get built on the basis of continuous engagement by Israeli politicians with the Palestinian leadership. The phrase in Cold War years was "confidence building" – a series of little steps demonstrating good faith and the incremental willingness of one side to trust the other. This is what Mr Netanyahu has crudely swept aside. This is what Mr Netanyahu looks incapable ever of supplying.

It would be idle to pretend the process of replacing him as prime minister or even as leader of Likud is going to be straightforward, or that there exists in the wings a set of leaders or party able to pull things together in the Knesset or win national elections. That adjustment is essentially an Israeli domestic matter. What Israel's friends abroad must do is keep up the moral and diplomatic pressure for peace. Here is one of the biggest lacunae in President Clinton's foreign policy. His special representative, Dennis Ross, would surely in these past months have been so much more effective if his shuttling had come with more of a threat – to withdraw financial aids, stiffen credits. The Israeli economy is in far from tip-top health. Israeli public

accounts are in a mess. If Israeli electors and party bosses consider the future, some material inducements of the kind the Americans command could be usefully deployed. But the decision is theirs. Israelis might, conceivably, forgive a prime minister over whom grave allegations hang if that individual were also offering them a plausible road to peace and prosperity. Mr Netanyahu faces an indictment when he already stands guilty of weakening his country's security and standing.

Interested? Oh yes

Oh well, things aren't so bad as they looked. We had started to worry that no one was going to turn out and vote on 1 May at all, the way things were looking. It was becoming impossible to find a good bar-room chat about the single currency, or a gossip on the latest tax twist down at the launderette, or find a parent ready to debate the finer points of education policy at the school gates. But it's not so bad. Our Harris poll today finds that one in every three voters is interested after all. So off that spin-doctoring all that extra news coverage, all that charging about in helicopters and generally going faintly potty for six weeks is not a waste of time at all. Phew.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Major misses the real issue on Europe

Sir: John Major's campaign theme that the Conservatives will never take Britain into a federal Europe smacks of hypocrisy.

The European Union has a number of features that make it more typical of a federation than of a traditional inter-governmental organisation, and many of these were willingly accepted or enhanced during Conservative terms of office: majority voting (extended by the Single European Act under Mrs Thatcher and the Maastricht treaty under Mr Major); the primacy of European law over national law (accepted when we joined under Mr Heath); a supreme court of justice (given the power to impose fines on member states by Maastricht, under Mr Major); a directly elected parliament (first elected in 1979 under Mrs Thatcher); an executive commission independent of national governments (whose independence was reinforced by Maastricht under Mr Major); and its own budget revenues (increased in 1984 and 1986 under Mrs Thatcher and in 1992 under Mr Major).

Rather than campaign against what they themselves have helped create, the Conservatives would do better to address the real issues of the European Union, namely how to manage our economic and environmental interdependence in a way that balances effective action with the diversity of the member states. That is what federalism is really supposed to be about and the sooner we drop the rhetoric and face up to reality the better.

RICHARD CORBETT MEP
(Merseyside West, Lab)
Liverpool

Sir: The Prime Minister now states that the Conservatives will not take Britain into a federal European state and that we will not opt for EMU without a referendum.

Does he take the British public for fools? If the first statement is true then the second is irrelevant. If the second statement is true then a referendum could negate the first. A federal European state could not be achieved without EMU and any nation opting for EMU would inevitably have to become part of a federal Europe.

There is only one question we need to ask ourselves. Do we wish to live under laws passed by our own democratically elected parliament or under laws passed by an unelected body of fat cats in Brussels whose only talent is the ability to bury their snouts in the largest trough on the biggest gravy train the world has ever seen?

ROBERT READMAN
(Poole, Dorset)

Sir: Andrew Marr is right to call the silence of the "timid pro-Europeans" a disgrace (article, 16 April). The "something" he pretends to have missed is of course the irrational feeling of fear and anger that so many people have when the word "Europe" is mentioned. It is interesting to note that few of these Euro-skeptics (or at least, the ones I have met) actually know much about Europe. When they do find out, their attitude usually changes.

Curious that some people see a bit of Tory sleaze as a fair price to pay for their own increased prosperity, yet balk at adopting the euro even if that were to mean low fixed-interest mortgages and increased job security. Why? Because they do not want to "surrender sovereignty" to Johnny Foreigner. British sleaze is



apparently preferable to any foreign influence; however decent

ROBIN PRIOR
Buckinghamshire

Legal challenge to Bell is absurd

Sir: You report ("Hamilton legal threat puts Bell on hold", 16 April) that Martin Bell "was advised by the returning officer that describing himself as an 'anti-corruption' candidate could leave him open to a legal challenge". Such advice would seem to be at variance with clearly expressed electoral law.

The returning officer has neither the obligation nor the power to arbitrate upon the descriptions offered by candidates other than to ensure that no more than six words are used. Current Home Office advice to acting returning officers is that if a nomination paper is properly submitted, together with necessary forms and the deposit, the candidate must be accepted.

The acting returning officer cannot go behind a candidate's preferred label and evaluate whether it is appropriate. Several such challenges involving the descriptor "Socialists" have been rejected on that basis since this election was announced. If Mr Hamilton believes he is being defamed then he must put that before a jury in a defamation action.

Martin Bell has now apparently been cowed by Mr Hamilton's description to "independent" on the basis that he has persisted with the phrase "independent anti-corruption candidate" could have led to the Tatton election result

being appealed to an election court. The argument of Mr Hamilton is preposterous. If his reasoning is correct then, come 2 May, scores of results up and down the country will be appealed by losing candidates who claim that they were prejudiced by an unfair innuendo in the title of another candidate.

DR GARY SLAPPER
The Law School
Staffordshire University
Stoke-on-Trent

Sir: Clement Freud (My Week, 14 April) was a politician of integrity who during his time in Parliament voted according to his convictions.

When I vote for a candidate I expect him to do the same, otherwise our electoral system becomes meaningless.

I should not have to cast my vote for any candidate who will vote according to the wishes of whatever party he happens to belong to. I should be able to trust that my MP will speak his own mind and cast his vote according to his conscience.

We are supposed to enjoy a parliamentary system in this country but as long as the whips wield the power they do, I am unable to choose a candidate on the basis that he will represent me honestly as he and nobody else thinks fit. If we can't get rid of the whips and their bullying tactics, then bring on the independents.

RICHARD WADE
Wokingham, Oxfordshire

Sir: Polly Toynbee speculates ("The horror of a new blue dawn",

14 April) that, if the Conservatives win the election, the anti-Tory majority will rise up with one voice and revolt. That such a thing might happen she blames on our "monstrous voting system".

If the anti-Tory majority would speak with one voice before the election, the problem would not arise. The beauty of our voting system is that it requires those who want a change of government to decide that they want a particular alternative, not just a change.

JULIAN GALL
Godalming, Surrey

Sir: Your leading article of 16 April tells us that the poor may not be significantly worse off in real terms than in 1979. That is too bland by far.

Between 1979 and 1994 the income of the bottom 10 per cent fell by 13 per cent in real terms. The income of the top 10 per cent rose by 65 per cent.

Less than 8 per cent of children lived in families on means-tested benefits in 1979. Now 25 per cent of children live in families claiming Income Support and over 10 per cent live in families claiming Family Credit. It is estimated that Income Support for a family of four, including two young children is about £55 a week below the amount needed to provide adequate food, clothing, fuel, transport and other necessities. The Low Income Project Team report of the

Government's Nutrition Task Force reports that for many people a healthy diet is beyond their means.

The Commission on Social Justice showed that the poor are dying younger now than in 1981. The rich are living longer. The British Medical Journal reported in February this year that professional workers could now expect to live over five years longer than unskilled manual workers whose life expectancy has diminished. The reasons given are stress, inadequate health care and inadequate diet. It all adds up to "the poor are significantly worse off in real terms now than in 1979".

THE REV PAUL NICOLSON
Chairman

Zacchaeus Trust
Turville, Buckinghamshire

Postal pledge

Sir: It is certainly not the case, as claimed in your articles about the Alliance & Leicester mailing (Business, 11 and 12 April), that "Royal Mail can only guarantee to deliver 98.5 per cent of mail posted".

In fact, we aim to deliver every item of mail as quickly as possible. Obviously, with large postings the mailing lists can contain errors, however stringently they are checked, and Royal Mail cannot be held responsible for failing to deliver letters that, for example, are wrongly addressed or whose intended recipients have moved without giving their new address.

JOHN TEW
Director and General Manager
Royal Mail, Oxford

Post letters to Letters to the Editor, and include a daytime telephone number. Fax: 0171-293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret we are unable to acknowledge unpublished letters.

Old soldiers never brawled

Sir: I am grieved to read of the "moral problems of troops sent to the Falklands on four-month postings, deprived of female company".

As a National Service airman in the 1950s I spent 18 months in Aden, also deprived of female company and with only the camp cinema and Naafi for entertainment. No video, no phone calls home, and the food was pretty poor. This was repeated at isolated spots all over the Middle and Far East and yet we did not feel the need to half-kill each other – in fact, it made us more tolerant of each other's faults.

The men in the Falklands should grow up and thank their lucky stars that overseas postings are reduced to such paltry periods.

T.N. HANCOCK
Lincoln

Ban those cars

Sir: Your article on the World Squares pedestrianisation project in London (17 April) asks where all the traffic will go. While we all now accept that new roads generate new traffic, many people have not yet grasped the corollary – that taking road space away reduces traffic.

It is unfortunate that many fine schemes for removing vehicles from our town centres fail to be implemented through unfounded concerns over the impact of displaced traffic. In most cases there will be a drop in total traffic. Princes Street in Edinburgh is a notable example.

PHILIP JONES
Kirkby, Staffordshire

Pioneer of billboard art

Sir: Paul McCann's article "Art goes public as students tap into billboard power" (14 April) typifies the cultural amnesia prevalent in the Nineties.

Billboard art, for want of a better term, was not pioneered by Barbara Kruger, but by the French radical painter Daniel Buren, in 1968. His stripe posters on the Paris Métro, *Legends I* and *II*, dealt with the cancelling of the commodity status of art. By evicting the gallery's stranglehold on meaning, he demonstrates that the work of art is governed as much by invisible economic factors as by cultural ones. The fact that art students are moving into the advertising business would suggest that today's artists are also governed primarily by economic factors.

M CRAIG
Rayleigh, Essex

Battle for the digital airwaves

Sir: Jeremy Warner was, unusually, misguided in his piece (12 April) on the contest for the ITC's Digital Terrestrial Television (DTT) licences. Most importantly, Digital Television Network (DTN) has at no point advocated splitting the award of the licences. We have, by far, the better thought-out proposal. If the ITC opt for an approach whereby DTT competes directly with digital satellite services, then the logic must be to award all three multiplexes to DTN, otherwise we would be competing with BSkyB with one hand tied behind our backs.

Mr Warner suggests that there are doubts about the commercial viability of DTT. Our experience in the multi-channel television market shows us that there is a very attractive commercial opportunity. This now seems increasingly to be the view in the City. The market for multi-channel television has been artificially constrained by the high entry price levied by BSkyB and the inflexible way in which only large bundles of programming are offered to the viewer.

The best future for British broadcasting is to have DTT as a competitor to digital satellite. BSkyB has clearly indicated that it will always give priority to its satellite business, the other British Digital Broadcasting shareholders also have substantial other broadcasting businesses whose interests they may wish to promote in preference to the digital terrestrial platform.

In contrast, DTN's bid has an unambiguous, well-funded and clear-sighted objective of spreading DTT take-up as quickly as possible.

JAMES GATWARD
Chairman

Digital Television Network
London SW1

That kind of idiot

Sir: Toby Stone (letter, 16 April) asks: "What kind of idiots do the Conservatives think voters are?" To this must come the reply: "The kind of idiots that have kept them in office for the past 18 years."

I sympathise with Mr Stone's disquietment over Toby attacks on Mr Blair's policy U-turns. I can only offer the reassurance that U-turns of similar magnitude did not do excessive damage to Mr Major's political career – witness the poll tax fiasco.

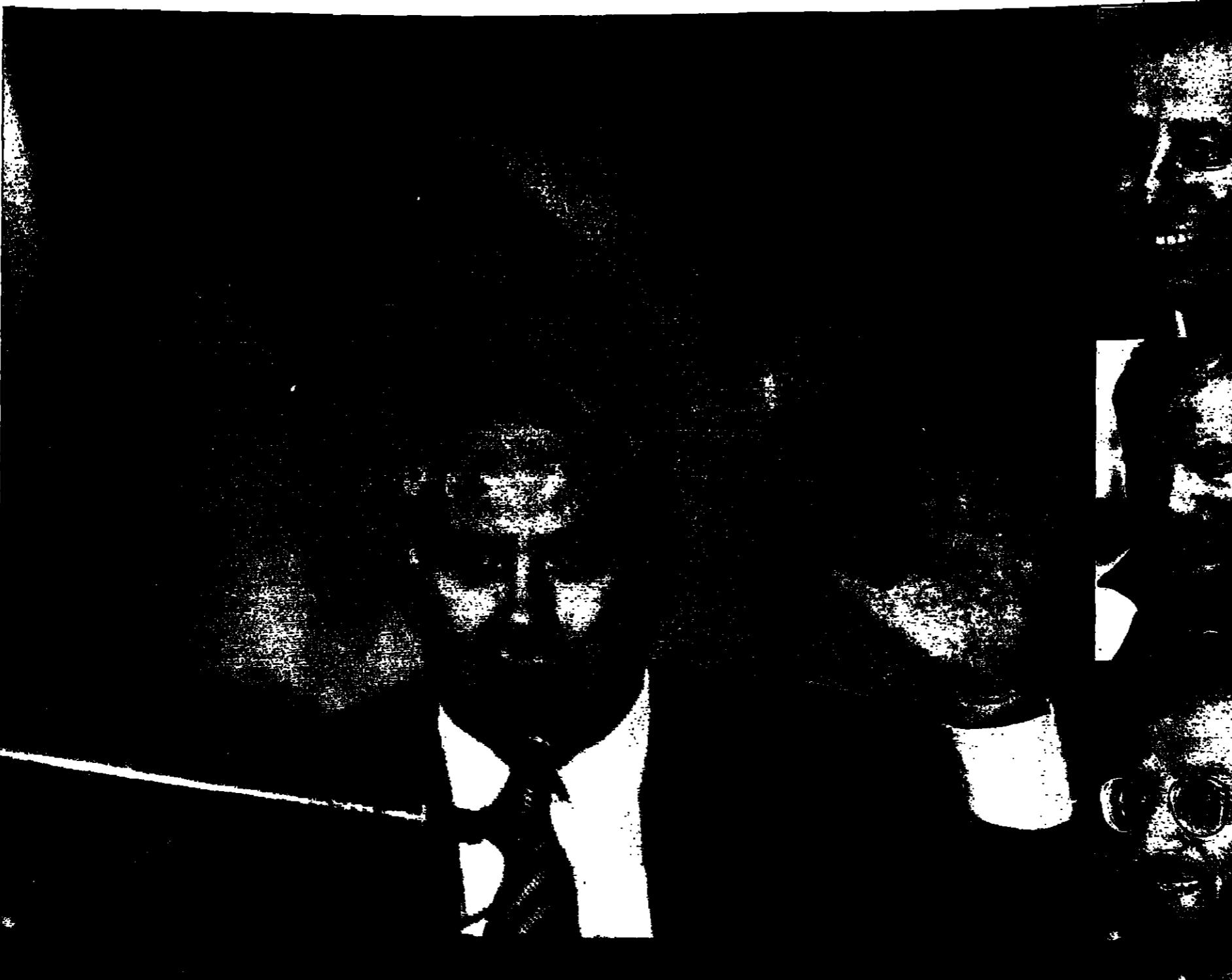
TOBY NANGLE
Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge

Not since Watergate has a national leader been in as much trouble as Benjamin Netanyahu, but the parallels with Richard Nixon's travails go even deeper, argues Patrick Cockburn

The cliché finally came true. For 25 years almost every political scandal in the world has been routinely and tediously compared to Watergate. Often the real parallels were limited. But not in the case of the scandal that may now bring an abrupt end to the career of Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister of Israel. His decline and probable fall are extraordinarily similar – the characters involved, their motives, the bureaucratic battles in the background – to what happened to President Richard Nixon in 1972-73.

Mr Netanyahu's character, as frequently noted in Israel, is very like that of Mr Nixon. Both had a meteoric rise to power. Neither had many scruples. They shared a paranoid-and-self-fulfilling belief that they were surrounded by enemies. In response they surrounded themselves with wholly loyal and subservient henchmen. Mr Nixon chose John Ehrlichman and HR Haldeman as his chief retainers; Mr Netanyahu relied on people from outside the political elite such as Avigdor Lieberman, director general of his office, and Tzahi Hanegbi, the Justice Minister. Israeli police now want to put both men on trial, along with the prime minister himself.

But there is another, less obvious, parallel between the



Isolated and unpopular: Benjamin Netanyahu, and key players in the scandal (from top) Tzahi Hanegbi, Avigdor Lieberman and Aryeh Deri

Friendless in Jerusalem

political disasters that engulfed President Nixon and those that now threaten Mr Netanyahu. Each in his own way had offended the powers that be, the bureaucracy of army and state. Mr Nixon could not get the CIA to say that the Watergate burglary was carried out for security reasons. Likewise in his 10 months in office Mr Netanyahu has offended the army, police, security services and judiciary as well as members of his own cabinet. It was no accident that Israel army radio began its programmes yesterday by playing: "Oh what a beautiful morning. Oh what a beautiful day."

This is the reason for thinking that Mr Netanyahu will fall. He is isolated. His cabinet ministers were slow – as the

news spread that police wanted him indicted for "fraud and breach of trust" – to come to his defence. And when they did so few spoke with any enthusiasm.

If he is indicted by Elyakim Rubinstein, the attorney general, on Sunday, he will probably go immediately. If he is not, then the process will take longer, but he is unlikely to be in office at the end of the summer. Much will depend on the ability of other members of his right-wing Likud party to unite behind an alternative leader.

It is a measure of Mr Netanyahu's unpopularity that most Israeli commentators gleefully expect him to fall even though the case against him is not very strong. Evidence of his involvement in the so-called "Bar-On affair" depends

largely on witnesses of uncertain reliability.

Not that many people have any doubt about Mr Netanyahu's general intentions. The scandal started last December. The former, highly respected attorney-general Michael Ben-Yair took the hint that it was time for him to go. Mr Ben-Yair had already forced Mr Netanyahu to get rid of his first choice as justice minister; because he was accused of making false statements to the Supreme Court. Elad Olmer, the Likud mayor of Jerusalem, was on trial for electoral fraud in the 1988 election. Other officials in trouble included a director of Mr Netanyahu's private office accused of making threatening calls to women, several of whom had complained to the police.

But there was one powerful figure in Israeli politics in greater need than others of a sympathetic hearing from the legal establishment. This was Aryeh Deri, a former interior minister and the leader of the religious party Shas, the third-largest party in the Knesset, whose 10 seats are crucial to Mr Netanyahu's coalition government. Mr Deri's long trial for corruption has been part of the background to Israeli politics for several years. It was drawing to an end and Mr Deri, a mercurial politician with great organisational talents, was

looking for a deal that would enable him to resume his seat in the cabinet.

Mr Netanyahu resolved to help him. What happened next is in dispute. But it is alleged that Mr Deri managed to get an attorney-general appointed who would give him a "judicial soft-landing". Exactly how he did so is the subject of a 995-page police report handed to the present attorney general, Edna Arbel, the state attorney, this week. The police believe a corrupt deal was done. They think Mr Deri was promised the attorney general's choice, one who, either through a plea-bargain or an amnesty, would allow the Shas leader to walk free.

It was here that Mr Netanyahu showed his naivete and his aides their inexperience. They could have chosen one of many prominent right-wing lawyers. Instead, on 10 January, Mr Netanyahu forced through his cabinet the appointment of an obscure Jerusalem attorney and Likud party loyalist called Romi Bar-On. The attorney general in Israel is usually a lawyer of standing. The very depth of Mr Bar-On's obscurity tended to highlight the motive for his appointment. The only explanation was that he was expected to go easy on Mr Netanyahu's friends and allies.

Mr Bar-On was laughed out of office. The Israeli media spoke of Genghis's horse. Law professors convened to issue an hysterical denunciation of his appointment. Abaron Barak, the chief justice, denied (covertly) to what Mr Hanegbi, the justice minister, had told the cabinet) that he was approved of the appointment. Amid much confusion Mr Bar-On resigned after less than 24 hours in his post. He never even saw his office in the Justice Ministry. There it might have rested. But two weeks later Ayalah Hasson, a reporter on Israeli television channel 1, made a sensational claim in a brief item on the nightly news. She said that Mr Deri had insisted on the appointment of M. Bar-On in order to obtain a plea-bargain. She further claimed – and it was this which ignited an immediate political explosion – that Mr Deri had threatened that if he did not get his way his party would vote against the agreement on the partial Israeli withdrawal from Hebron just

signed with the Palestinians. Thus the so-called "Bar-On for Hebron" affair was born.

Of course nothing is quite as simple as this in Israeli politics.

Mr Deri's own lawyer, Dan Avi-Yitzhak, had wanted the job of attorney general for himself. When Mr Deri, not wanting to lose his legal representative in the middle of his trial, blocked the appointment, Mr Avi-Yitzhak resigned and denounced his former client. He has since become the police's main witness on how and why Mr Bar-On was appointed, including the involvement of Mr Netanyahu.

As details of the "Bar-On Affair" were published, Israeli commentators spoke of the "Italianisation" of Israeli politics. Everybody touched by the case seemed to have shadowy, if not corrupt, motives. Mr Netanyahu turns out to know a surprising number of people on the edge of the law. In politics he has always lived dangerously. In 1993, for example, he admitted his adultery on television but claimed he was being blackmailed with an incriminating video of the affair by his political enemies.

Has Mr Netanyahu now come to the end of the road? He will certainly fight back. The only picture on the wall of his office, apart from family portraits, is of Gamla, above the Sea of Galilee, where Jews jumped to their

deaths to escape the attack of the Roman legions. He has a Messianic view of his role. If the American politician of the previous generation he most resembles is Richard Nixon, his present-day counterpart is probably Newt Gingrich, the Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives. Like him the Israeli prime minister owes his rise to his glibness on television, mostly American television, his rich baritone voice dominating interviews and press conferences.

But like Mr Gingrich he often appears rootless and rudderless. Leaders as diverse as King Hussein and Ariel Sharon, his minister of infrastructure, have said publicly that they no longer believe a word he says to them. He has few friends. He has relied on a small kitchen cabinet of advisers including Mr Lieberman, David Bar-Ilan, his chief spokesman, and Dore Gold, his foreign policy adviser. He won the election to be prime minister in 1996 by only 30,000 votes and since then his popularity has not increased. It is this political isolation that may doom him as much as the gravity of the accusations made by the police.

It is a measure of Mr Netanyahu's failure to assert his authority within the Israeli government machine that he only knew that the police wanted to charge him minutes before it was announced on television on Thursday night. He may now be paying a price for alienating so much of the Israeli establishment since he took office. Not that they ever regarded him with much sympathy. Asked what he thought of Mr Netanyahu's government, soon after it was formed last June, one conservative Israeli banker replied: "I have never seen a government here so full of crooks and war criminals."

This is a little harsh. But Mr Netanyahu came from outside the Israeli government system. He had made his career as an Israeli diplomat in Washington and New York who could speak on the US television. He had more friends among American columnists and talk-show hosts than their counterparts back in Israel. It is this which made him leader of the right-wing Likud party. Right-wing American Jewish millionaires financed his campaign. American advisers helped him win last year's election. The Israeli right suspects him of willingness to give in under American pressure on issues like Hebron.

Palestinians are jubilant that Mr Netanyahu may go. But it does not necessarily follow that his departure will remove all the difficulties facing the Oslo accords. Israelis are not turning against him because he built a Jewish settlement at Har Homa. A majority of Israeli Jews voted for parties in effect opposing Oslo in the last election.

If Netanyahu stays, his authority will be crippled. If he goes, Israel will have had three prime ministers in 18 months. This is a symptom of great political instability, of deep divisions within Israeli society, which perhaps only a final agreement with the Palestinians can bring to an end.

A Tory

A nice how-d'ye-do about a man called Hajdu

I was in the pub the other day carrying a book with me, on the principle that books are a good substitute for conversation. If there's nobody to talk to, you can pull a book out and start reading it. I find this pays off in supermarket check-out queues,

when you have to wait for 10 minutes for the woman in front to find her credit card.

"What's that book, then?"

said the man next to me, who for the purposes of this conversation I shall identify as "the man".

"You wouldn't be interested," I said.

"How do you know?" said the man.

"Because you're not interested in books," said his wife, whom I shall refer to as "his wife", although this may have unfortunate possessive overtones to feminist ears.

"I'm not interested in all books," said the man

defensively, "but I'm interested in some books. By the law of averages, there's bound to be some books I'm interested in. What book is it?"

"It's a biography of Billy Strayhorn," said the man.

"There was a long pause.

"You're right," said the man.

man. "I'm not interested in that. It's a rule of mine that if you've never heard of the book's about, there's a fair chance you're not going to be much interested in his life. Is it by anyone famous?"

"A man called David Hajdu," I said, showing him the book.

"Now I'm interested again," said the man. "I'm interested in how anyone can have a name like that."

"No, you're not," said his wife. "You've never been interested in names."

"Not before," said the man.

"But I never met a name like Hajdu. I'm interested now. Where's he from?"

"America," I said.

"Well that's no clue," said the man. "Could be from anywhere, an American name. Hajdu, Hajdu."

"Sounds Albanian to me," I said. "The Albanians specialize in those names that look like leftover Scrabble hands. Enver Hoxha, for instance."

"Could be," said the man.

"Hajdu..."

"How do you do?" said the landlord, arriving at this moment.

"Interesting that you

talking about tenterhooks.

"I'll give you another example. We don't talk about stupid children any more – we talk about children with learning difficulties. But we still talk about bad teachers. We don't talk about grown-ups with teaching difficulties."

There was a silence here. Everyone knew he had made a good point, but nobody knew what it was. When this happens, you either wait for clarification or change the subject. I changed the subject.

"I'll tell you one expression which has always puzzled me," I said, "and that is that strange euphemism for sex – to have 'carnal knowledge' of someone. In my experience, knowledge is very seldom involved. I think to have 'carnal ignorance' of someone would be nearer the mark."

The man frowned, but the man smiled and nodded, as if reminded of some private memory.

"You're right," he said.

"And how about 'worried stiff'?" That's a strange expression when you think about it. When I'm worried, I don't stiffen. I collapse. I fold up. 'Worried limp'

would be nearer the mark than 'worried stiff'."

He looked at the book again.

"Hajdu," he said. "Where else would you find a name like that but in America? Or Albania," he said to me, as a concession.

"In film credits," said his wife. "The weirdest names always crop up in film credits. Of all nations."

"Name one," said the man. "I know you might ask," said the wife, "so I wrote one down I saw on TV the other day. Here it is." She searched in her handbag.

"Rudd Weatherwax," she read from a small notepad.

"What film did you find that in?" said the man scornfully.

"All the old Lassie films have it. There is a credit saying 'Lassie trained by Rudd Weatherwax'."

There was a pause. The man drained his glass.

"What would you like?" he said to me.

"A chance to read my book, I thought. But it was too late. I was trapped inside another pub conversation. It was my fault for bringing a book, really."

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Co-op suspends two bosses over 'breach of trust'

Alleged link with Andrew Regan leads to investigation

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

Two of the most powerful men in the Co-operative Wholesale Society were suspended yesterday amid suspicions they were in league with Andrew Regan and his Lanica Trust vehicle, which is interested in acquiring parts of the business.

As details began to emerge of secret meetings, photographic evidence and logged telephone calls, the CWS moved yesterday lunchtime to suspend Allan Green, controller of the CWS retailing division, and David Chambers, chief general manager of the buying, marketing and supply chain. Both left the CWS offices in Manchester immediately.

The Co-op said the suspensions "arose from a suspected recent serious breach of trust". The CWS has also appointed Linklaters & Paines, the City law firm, and KPMG, the chartered accountancy, to conduct an investigation into business dealings between the divisions managed by the two men and "companies controlled by Andrew Regan in the period 1994 to 1997".

This includes the period dating back to the sale of the CWS's food manufacturing business to Mr Regan when he was running Hobson, a food company he later sold.

The implication is that the Co-op believes that the two managers had been helping Mr Regan in his attempts to buy parts of the Co-op.

It is understood that Mr Green and Mr Chambers had been holding secret talks with Mr Regan regarding a possible deal. The CWS is also thought to be looking at the trading relationship between Hobson and the CWS.

The Serious Fraud Office said it was not investigating the

affair and would not say whether it had been contacted by the Co-op.

It is not yet clear whether Mr Green and Mr Chambers benefited personally from the sale of the food manufacturing businesses to Mr Regan, or if they stood to gain from any subsequent deal with Lanica Trust.

CWS first became suspicious when confidential information on its affairs, available to only a small group of senior executives, appeared recently in a Sunday newspaper. CWS believes the story was placed by Lanica which had somehow managed to obtain the information.

The CWS confronted Mr Green but he denied the allegations.

The CWS subsequently obtained photographic evidence of secret meetings between Mr Green and Mr Regan.

Details of telephone calls between Mr Green and Mr Regan's home and office were also obtained.

Mr Green was interviewed at length about the matter yesterday morning and confronted with the photographic and tele-

phone evidence. However, he still denied it. He was then suspended immediately together with Mr Chambers with whom he has been working closely.

Further developments are expected though the CWS would not say yesterday whether any other suspensions are likely.

It is possible that Mr Regan had more "friendly" sources within the movement.

As Mr Green was a member of the CWS executive committee his suspension depletes that group yet further. Following the election of John Owen, the head of the specialist retail business, to step down from the committee earlier this month there are now only three of the original five members left.

The CWS said yesterday that chief executive Graham Melville will take over Mr Green's role.

Details of telephone calls between Mr Green and Mr Regan's home and office were also obtained.

Mr Green joined the CWS in 1990 from Booker, the cash-and-carry group where he was a buying director. In January he was made head of the buying, marketing and supply chain. He also headed the Co-operative Retail Trading Group, a buying consortium.

Mr Chambers joined the CWS in 1993 from Poundstretcher, the discount retailer.

Their suspensions will come as a devastating blow to the morale of the CWS as it faces the greatest challenge in its long history.

However, it may draw comfort from having taken this action and hope that it spurs Mr Regan's guns.

It may ultimately prove a bigger blow to Mr Regan if his route to the top is blocked. The CWS is unlikely to have dealings with him.

Comment, page 23

Allan Green: Evidence of 'secret meetings'



Elusive carrot: Kenneth Clarke (left) came within an ace of meeting the Government's 2.5 inflation target. The main reason for the slowdown was a sharp drop in the price of seasonal foods in the supermarkets during March. They tumbled by 2.6 per cent to a level 15.6 per cent lower than a year earlier

'Vegetables are saving Clarke's bacon'

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

Inflation slowed last month thanks to a big fall in vegetable prices but it was not quite enough to give the Government the pleasure of claiming it had finally hit its 2.5 per cent inflation target.

Kenneth Clarke, Chancellor, said: "Britain's economy is booming while inflation stays well under control." The Conservatives had achieved the longest period of low inflation for half-a-century, he said.

But shadow chancellor Gordon Brown accused the Government of failing to meet its own target. "The Prime Minister and the Chancellor both

promised they would hit their inflation target of 2.5 per cent or less by the end of the Parliament but they have failed to do so," he said.

Meanwhile, Malcolm Bruce for the Liberal Democrats predicted that the boom would end in bust.

Headline inflation declined from 2.7 to 2.6 per cent, while the underlying target measure, which excludes mortgage interest payments, fell from 2.9 to 2.7 per cent.

The main reason for the slowdown was a sharp drop in the price of seasonal foods during March.

They tumbled by 2.6 per cent to a level 15.6 per cent lower than a year earlier.

thanks to the effect of mild weather on the vegetable crop.

Potatoes, for instance, have fallen 45 per cent in price during the past 12 months. Greens like cauliflower, lettuce and cucumbers are one-fifth cheaper than a year ago.

As Simon Briscoe, economist at the Japanese bank Nippon, put it: "It is a case of vegetables saving Clarke's bacon."

The strong pound has also helped trim the price of imported foods.

Other items, especially high street categories like household goods and clothing and footwear, jumped unexpectedly.

"Cost inflation is still tumbling but retailers are also trying their luck with prices," said John O-

Sullivan at NatWest Markets.

The pace at which the price of services is rising held steady at 3.3 per cent last month. However, a pick-up in wages in the services sector is likely to set off price inflation back on its year-long upward trend.

Some City experts believe the inflation threat is overblown.

"Not for the first time people in the markets and the media are getting scared about inflation quite out of proportion to the situation on the ground," said Roger Bootle of HSBC Markets.

But most found worrying signals in yesterday's figures.

Simon Briscoe, one of the few analysts to have been arguing that the economy is not booming enough to justify higher in-

terest rates, admitted yesterday: "It looks as if the stronger demand in the high street has prompted retailers to raise prices."

Most economists think there is a good chance underlying inflation will hit the 2.5 per cent target, briefly, at some point this year. This will be the first time since the end of 1994 that it has done so.

However, an increase in interest rates remains on the cards after the election because the economy is expanding fast again later this year.

The financial markets expect base rates to be a percentage point higher at 7 per cent by the end of this year.

BT Spanish coup red rag to AT&T bull

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Telecom and its US partner, MCI, are today expected to sign a global alliance with Spain's telephone group, Telefónica, securing a big coup over AT&T, their main rival in the fast-growing market for international business communications.

The privatised Spanish network last night called a press conference for today to announce what it said would be an "international alliance". Neither Telefónica nor BT would confirm that the link-up involved the two sides, though unless the Spanish group pulls out of the signing ceremony at the last

minute the deal appeared to be concluded. Sir Ian Vallance, BT chairman, was thought to be planning to fly to Madrid for the announcement.

The alliance will give Concert, the BT/MCI global business communications venture, a significant headstart over rivals in the rapidly expanding market in Latin America, where Telefónica has a substantial foothold.

Earlier this week BT/MCI concluded a similar alliance with Portugal Telecom, which gave them a potential link-up with Brazil's state telephones operator, Telebras. The phone market there is worth \$14bn (£8.6bn), accounting for 40 per cent of Latin America.

The Telefónica deal is ex-

pected to involve the Spanish group taking cross-shareholdings with Portugal Telecom. At last week's signing ceremony the Portuguese made the bizarre mistake of accidentally issuing a press statement about a "pan-American joint venture between MCI and Telefónica", only to immediately withdraw it.

Discussions between BT and Telefónica have continued for several weeks as it became clear the Spanish company was unhappy with its existing alliance with Unisource, a grouping of smaller European phone networks with AT&T. The US long-distance giant, Telefónica has a 25 per cent stake in Unisource, though it is regarded by analysts as

having been slow to make inroads into the business market.

The talks incensed AT&T, which has been struggling to outline its international strategy to investors in the face of competition from Concert and Global One, the link-up between Sprint of the US, Deutsche Telekom and France Telecom.

Concert and Telefónica are believed to have agreed to buy stakes in Unisource to cement the relationship.

The prize for BT is Telefónica's valuable shareholdings in South American carriers through Tisa, its international arm. BT and MCI are believed to have agreed to buy stakes in Tisa to cement the relationship.

City greets Aston Villa stock market launch with enthusiasm

Jim Levi

City institutions have given an enthusiastic reception to Aston Villa's stock market launch. A placing of 1.36 million shares in Birmingham's only Premier League club at £1.1 each had been "very, very well received" said Chris Hawkey of spon-

soring brokers Albert E Sharp.

Mr Hawkey expects the institutional placing to be oversubscribed three times. The terms give the business, including £20m worth of freehold stadia and training grounds, a stock market tag of £12.5m.

Doug Ellis, chairman of Villa,

predicted the parallel public offering of 454,545 shares also at £1.1 a share, aimed at Villa players, staff and fans, could be oversubscribed five or six times. The public offering is for a minimum of 40 shares at a cost of £40.

Mr Ellis, who rescued the club from a financial crisis in the late 1980s and whose family will retain a 35 per cent stake in the company, claimed the City's enthusiasm was prompted by the financial strength of the business and its conservative management approach.

This is a business that has been run as a business, not as

a fantasy," Mr Ellis said. "We at Aston Villa have possibly the best balance sheet you could find among Premiership football clubs."

The club's strategy, he said, was based on funding the purchase of players and their wages entirely out of operating profits. The club was debt-free though it had a £10m overdraft facility. The flotation will raise around £15m of new money, enough to fund plans to raise the Villa Park stadium's capacity from 40,000 to 50,000.

Dealers in the Villa shares are expected to start on 7 May.

People & Business, page 25

'One more mistake and I'll go quietly'

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

Brian McGowan yesterday pledged to "fall on his sword" as chairman of the struggling House of Fraser department store group if the company made any more mistakes.

The promise came as John Coleman, chief executive, admitted that some of the merchandise it was contracted to buy was "crap". This explains why the group has carried forward a large provision to cover

provisions, then "that would be another reason to take the plunge".

There is no point in making out that this has been a happy last three years. I can assure you that it hasn't been a happy story for me either."

He said that if he did leave, or was pushed out of the group, he would go without compensation as he had no contract with the company. Mr McGowan was brought in at great expense to chair House of Fraser when it was floated off from

Harrods in 1994. But its performance has been undermined by poor merchandise and weak sales. The shares have rarely risen above the 180p issue price since late 1994. Yesterday they closed at 165p, up 0.5p.

The full scale of the stock problems became clear yesterday when it emerged that the company had carried forward a £2.5m provision. This will cover redundancy costs and store disposals but also further stock write-offs. Asked whether this meant that the company had

contracted to buy "crap", Mr Coleman replied "yes".

Mr Coleman stressed that House of Fraser now had a new buying team and the new merchandise would soon start to show through.

House of Fraser will launch a new private label brand in the summer which will include men's and women's ranges.

The company recorded a £38.4m loss last year compared to a £14m profit in 1995 due to exceptional cost of £53.2m.

Investment column, page 25

Henry Boot

1996 ANNUAL RESULTS ANOTHER RECORD YEAR

Year ended 31st December 1996 1995

Turnover	£162.1m	£179.2m
Operating profit	£9.2m	£7.5m
Profit before tax	£9.4m	£8.7m
Earnings per share	25.1p	23.6p
Dividends per share	8.0p	7.5p
Net assets per share	214p	198p

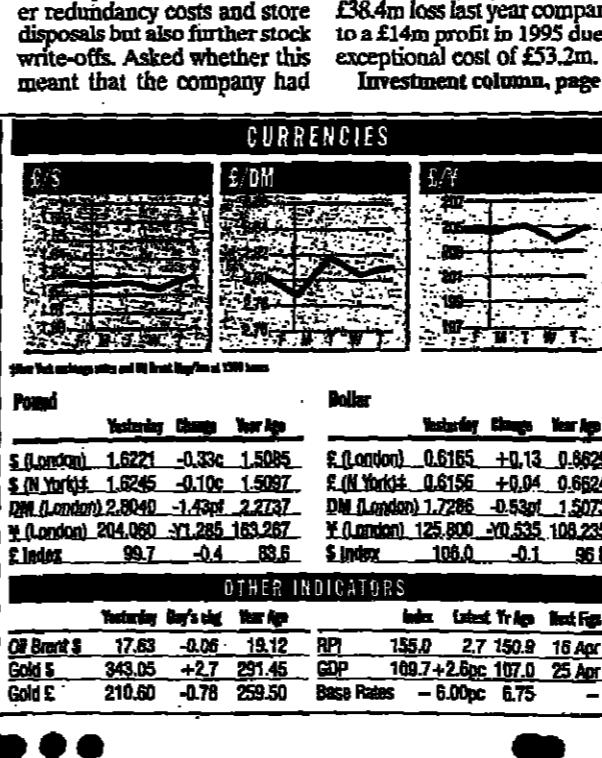
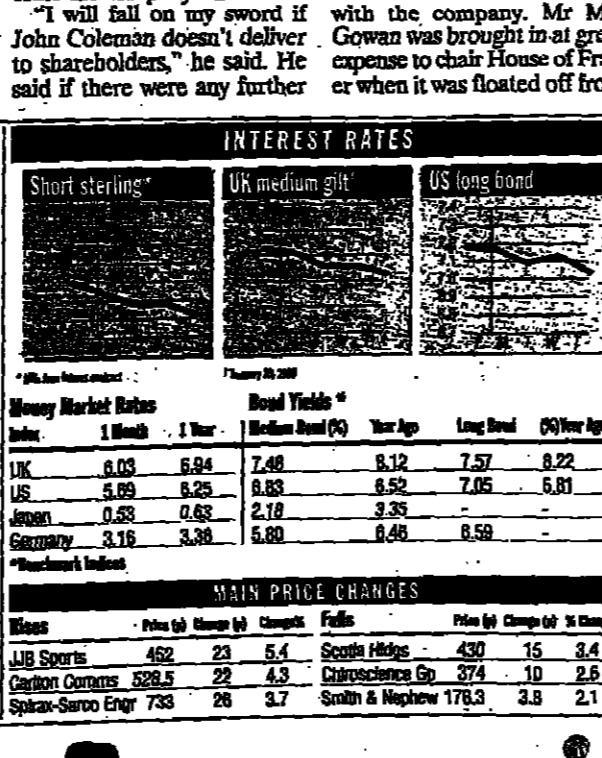
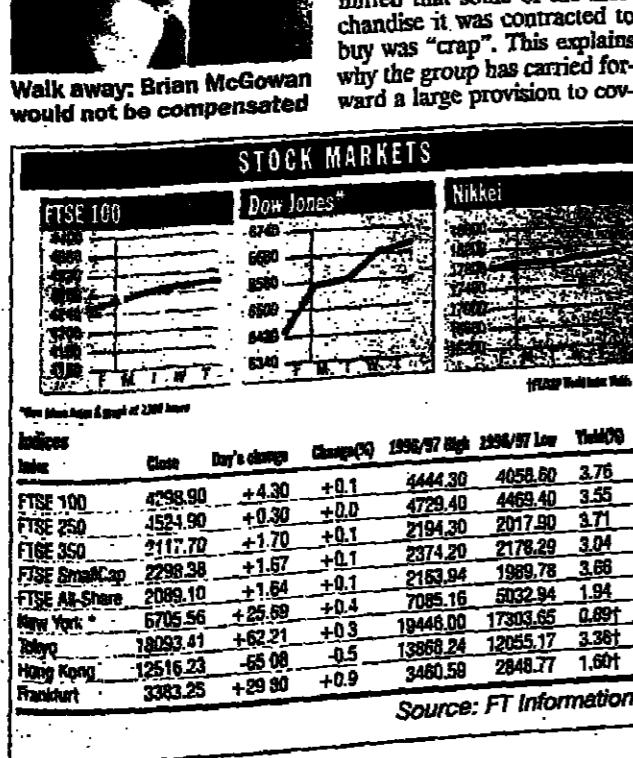
- Operating Profit Up 23%
- Record Pre-Tax Profit Up 8%
- Dividends Up 7%
- Net Assets per Share Up 8%

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Source: FT Information

business

Names will dig deeper to back underwriting

Tom Stevenson
City Editor

Lloyd's of London's individual members, or names, will be asked to stump up greater funds to back their underwriting capacity at the insurance market if far-reaching proposals unveiled yesterday are accepted.

The planned changes are expected to accelerate the market's recent trend away from its traditional backing by individual members with unlimited liability towards a more modern insurance market in the hands of limited-liability corporate members.

Andrew Duguid, the secretary to Lloyd's Council who was responsible for pulling the proposals together, said increasing scrutiny of insurers' security and the need to enhance Lloyd's competitiveness following the disastrous losses of recent years had acted as a catalyst to the review.

He admitted that an imminent credit rating for the whole Lloyd's market from credit rating agency S&P had also been a stimulus for the changes.

"The achievement of Lloyd's reconstruction and renewal plan has undoubtedly improved the perception of Lloyd's secu-

rity, but Lloyd's cannot expect exemption from the increasing trend towards thorough scrutiny of all insurers and reinsurers," Mr Duguid said.

He admitted the measures might lead to some of Lloyd's 10,000 individual members reducing their exposure or even quitting the market altogether but he denied that the more stringent requirements represented a deliberate attempt to discriminate against individual members. He said they would make the market more transparent and level the playing field between individual and corporate members.

The changes will ultimately see individual members being treated more or less the same as their corporate counterparts. They will have to lodge progressively greater funds in trust with Lloyd's, headed by David Rowland to back their underwriting until their collateral matches the proportion put up by corporates and they will have to show greater total means to provide security for their activities at Lloyd's.

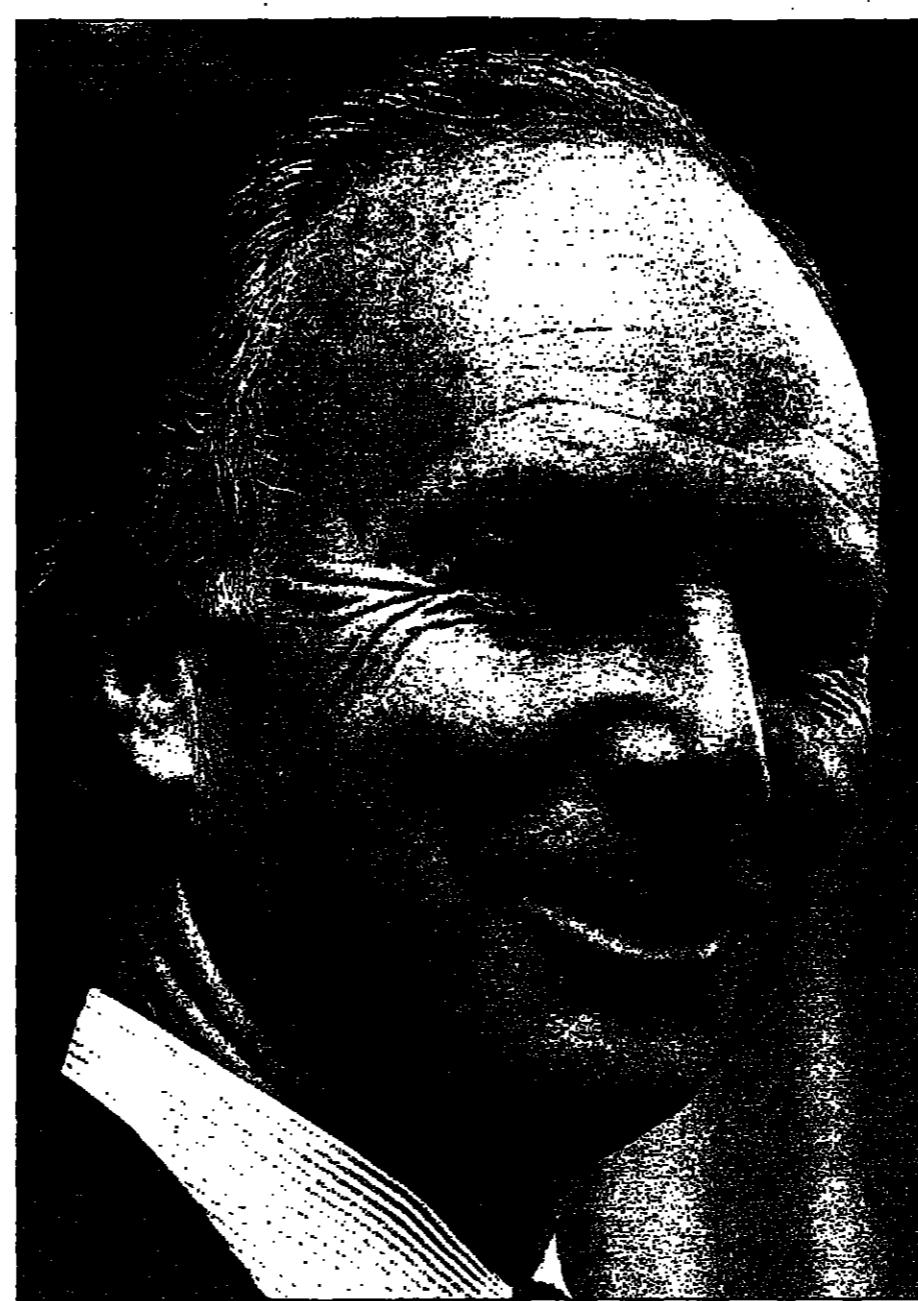
Currently, individual members can underwrite premiums with as little as 20 per cent of their exposure held at Lloyd's in trust, while corporates put up

at least 50 per cent and more in cases where they are perceived to have a narrow exposure to a small number of underwriting syndicates.

From next year individuals must lodge 40 per cent of their proposed exposure, rising to 50 per cent by 1999, three-quarters of which must be in the form of funds held in trust at Lloyd's. If they choose to provide some collateral in the form of other personal wealth held outside Lloyd's, they will be expected to provide evidence of greater assets than if all their collateral is lodged with the market, to compensate for the greater perceived risk that those assets will not be available to pay for underwriting losses.

By 1999, the minimum total means requirement, which includes funds held at Lloyd's and other personal wealth, will have risen from £250,000 to £350,000. Also by that year, personal homes will no longer be acceptable as collateral for the letters of credit that names have traditionally used as part of their funds held at Lloyd's.

The changes are part of a review of all aspects of security at Lloyd's including the adequacy of criteria used to regulate policyholders' premiums.



Under review: David Rowland of Lloyd's of London, which is proposing far-reaching changes on how names should meet future financial commitments

Upturn in US boosts Pru's policy sales to £1.8bn

Clifford German

The Prudential, which last month clinched the purchase of Scottish Amicable, yesterday reported a boom in new business in the first quarter of the year, with sales of single premium policies leaping 22 per cent to £1.76bn and regular premium policies rising 17 per cent to £1.30bn compared with the first three months of 1996.

Sir Peter Davis, chief executive of Britain's biggest life assurance group, described the sales figures as "very encouraging". He added that the sales

momentum "we built up in 1996 has continued into 1997".

The figures were received reasonably favourably among analysts. Charles Landau, analyst at SocGen, said they were "obviously very good figures".

However, along with other analysts, he said the Pru's UK results - its largest business area - were less impressive than other parts of the world.

Most of the improvement came from the US, where Jackson National Life has reaped the benefit of expanding its product range. However, Andrew Pitt, an analyst at Sa-

lon Brothers, said: "Don't get overwhelmed by the Jackson National Life figures in the US," noting that new products introduced throughout 1996 boosted the first-quarter figures.

After the release of the figures Prudential's shares featured among the FTSE 100 index's best performing stocks, recording a 1.2 per cent advance at one stage, but drifted in later trading and closed the session just 1p higher at 368.5p.

Sales of fixed annuities in the US rose 45 per cent to £324m, equity-linked indexed annuities grew from nothing to £55m

and variable annuities from £19m to £111m. Sales of guaranteed investment contracts grew by 30 per cent to £215m and insurance contracts by 71 per cent to £705m.

In the UK performance was much more patchy. Regular premium business was up 18 per cent at £84m but single premium business grew only 2 per cent to £895m, in spite of improved sales of the Prudence Bond, Britain's best-selling product, which brought in £221m of single premiums.

Pension sales were up 6 per cent to £104m, life policies by 6 per cent to £344m and sales of investment products including PEPs doubled to £72m. But sales of annuities were down 15 per cent to £180m and business linked to DSS contributions was also down, to just £37m.

The direct sales force accounted for over half the UK sales of single premium policies, £468m out of £885m, and its sales of investment products trebled to £65m, almost compensating for a 11 per cent fall in sales of insurance policies.

Sales through independent financial advisers (IFAs) in-

BA to sell catering operation

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Airways' in-flight catering business at Heathrow Airport was put up for sale yesterday, a move which could lead to bidding scramble among the world's leading airline catering companies.

The news was seen as one of the most important opportunities to expand in the rapidly consolidating in-flight catering market, which is thought to be worth as much as £1bn annually in the UK. It is also the latest step in British Airways' drive to find £1bn of efficiency savings by 2000 through the closure, sale or outsourcing of operations.

British Airways made the decision to sell the business, called Heathrow Catering Production, after an internal study concluded it would find itself facing stiff competition from larger specialist players. Bob Ayling, chief executive, said: "Significant productivity improvements our people have made are not enough for us to remain competitive against the new, global super-caterers."

The business owns two huge kitchens at Heathrow which prepare 25,000 meals a day each. One of the kitchens employs 1,200 British Airways staff involved in the preparation of long-haul meals, while the kitchen for short-haul flights is run by contractors. British Airways decided to put a figure on the operation's sales, though industry sources suggested it could be £70m a year. The likely price tag was also not disclosed, although observers said it could reach up to £100m.

The airline said talks would begin immediately with outside catering companies and yesterday the UK's largest in-flight catering business, Alpha Airports Group, seemed likely to launch a bid. Alpha is already responsible for most of British Airways' catering at other UK airports, including Gatwick, with sales last year of £211m. The group said it had about 50 per cent of the UK in-flight catering market.

Stuart Siddall, Alpha's finance director, said: "We'll certainly be able to integrate the business and it will be balanced by the potential to supply other airlines and growth in the market. Mr Siddall said: "You'd expect we'd be able to integrate the business in an efficient way. But cost cutting isn't everything. Quality and reliability are also crucial."

Mr Ayling has fiercely denied claims he is intent on turning British Airways into a "virtual airline" where most operations are run by outside contractors.

Last month 3,000 ground-based staff at Heathrow agreed to accept a two-year pay freeze in order to prevent the division from being sold or closed.

Other potential buyers include LSG Sky Chefs, the world's largest in-flight caterer resulting from a merger of Lufthansa's catering arm. Demand for in-flight meals at Heathrow is set to expand through passenger growth and if the government approves a fifth terminal at the airport.

British Airways insisted the sale would not lead to job losses at Heathrow, though specialist caterers did not rule out the possibility. Alpha said the



Bob Ayling: Productivity gains were not enough

potential for cost cutting could be balanced by the potential to supply other airlines and growth in the market. Mr Siddall said:

"You'd expect we'd be able to integrate the business in an efficient way. But cost cutting isn't everything. Quality and reliability are also crucial."

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Tie Rack expands in Japan

Tie Rack is expanding its Asia Pacific operations by forming a 50-50 joint venture in Japan with Fujita, which owns 50 per cent of McDonald's Japan and through this 20 per cent of Toys R Us Japan.

Roy Bishko, chairman, who yesterday announced an increase in Tie Rack's annual taxable profits from £7.93m to £8.79m, said: "Japan is potentially a major market for Tie Rack and one in which we wanted a direct involvement through a joint venture."

While the link with Fujita was announced yesterday, operations with the Japanese company started in July 1995 and there were 11 shops by the time the joint venture was established two months ago.

"Initial trading has been encouraging but this is a very expensive market in which to operate and we do not expect significant returns in the short term," said Mr Bishko.

On group trading Mr Bishko said the first two months of 1997 had been generally satisfactory "although the pressure on overseas earnings experienced in the final quarter of the last financial year caused by the substantial appreciation of sterling has continued".

He expected shop numbers to grow by around 10 per cent this year with the growth arising predominantly overseas.



Driving seat: Fisher's chairman, Stephen Walls (left), and Neil England. Photograph: FT

England puts Fisher action plan into gear

Neil England, the new chief executive at Albert Fisher, yesterday announced details of a three-year business plan to revitalise the food group.

Mr England, former head of the Mars group's Moscow operations, said there would be more investment in processing in the countries of production and in new products, while leveraging off its strong position in areas such as fish, citrus fruit and frozen foods.

The aim was "to drive more

than to be driven" he said. Many of the operations are to be brought together under the Fisher name to give the group a common sense of purpose.

The news came as the group announced that first-half pre-tax profits of £19.1m replaced losses of £24m last time.

Fisher had to battle against a disastrous Dutch cockle harvest, which reduced the yield to just 13 per cent of expectations, and potato prices which have halved over the past year.

But Mr England suggested the current UK drought could have a silver lining if it drove up fresh vegetable prices.

When that happened in 1995, the group made "windfall" profits of around £2m from its frozen food operations.

Fisher denied that the decision to maintain the interim dividend at 1.85p, where it is only just covered by earnings per share of 1.97p, would restrain its ability to grow.

Investment column, page 25

Company Results			
	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS
			Dividend
Action Computer (I)	80.0m (83.4m)	2.25m (+1.45m)	4.3p (3.8p)
BATN (F)	59.75m (57.52m)	5.04m (52.75m)	10.95c (10.73c)
Heavy Roof (F)	162m (178m)	9.38m (8.85m)	25.1p (23.8p)
Brasdale Holdings (F)	162m (179m)	-0.16m (-0.23m)	8p (7.5p)
British Building & Eng (F)	18.2m (16.0m)	0.02m (-1.3m)	0.5p (+1.0p)
Eyecare Products (F)	56.1m (52.5m)	0.53m (3.2m)	0.5p (1.5p)
Albert Pickler (I)	500m (590m)	19.1m (18.8m)	1.97p (1.97p)
Galler Group (F)	37.0m (35.0m)	3.95m (3.65m)	13.8p (11.8p)
Havestock Farmers (F)	67.7m (55.7m)	5.9m (5.28m)	14.6p (13.5p)
House of Fraser (F)	70.1m (74.0m)	5p (1.5p)	5.5p (5.5p)
Iota Energy Group (F)	72.2m (63.0m)	5.63m (4.41m)	4.45p (4.3p)
Wilson Jacks (F)	103m (97.9m)	1.21m (0.85m)	0.33p (0.25p)
Jackson Group (F)	81.5m (78.65m)	1.31m (1.11m)	3.0p (2.2p)
Laser-Scan (F)	7.9m (7.3m)	0.30m (-0.22m)	0.0p (-1.2p)
Linden (F)	44.6m (31.5m)	1.38m (0.77m)	14.2p (7.3p)
Tie Rack (F)	105m (96.5m)	8.75m (7.93m)	10.73p (9.87p)
(F) - Final (F) - Interim (F) - Pre- and post figures pre-exclusions			3.35p (2.75p)

BSG close to deal on cabin interior maker

BSG International is close to buying Baderus Sell, the German aircraft seat and lavatory modules manufacturer, and expects to make an announcement "within the next few weeks", said Richard Marton, chief executive.

Baderus, based in Herborn, produces cabin interiors for commercial aircraft and lavatory units for Airbus Industrie through a joint venture with Daimler-Benz Aerospace.

Turnover in the last financial year was DM106m (£37m).

Mr Marton added yesterday: "The deal would make the group one of the largest pro-

ducers of cabin interior products and strengthens its position in our chosen area of automotive and aircraft equipment."

BSG intends to finance the deal from the proceeds of the recent £72m sale of its Bristol Street Motors car dealership arm, a move which was designed to enable the company to focus on its Brixton business.

The acquisition would be a big step in this direction, with Brixton - best known for its child seat and car safety products - at the heart of its international brand development programme.

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July 1997

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COMMENT

'It might seem pernicious to mark him down when, as he so rightly points out, inflation has been lower for longer than any time in the past 50 years. But the scoring is for skill and judgement as well as luck.'



Clarke gets B+ for inflation and A for style

The inflation target has been the central piece of the Conservatives' economic policy since Britain was unceremoniously kicked out of the ERM in September 1992. The time has come for an end-of-term report on Kenneth Clarke's achievement.

Successful as he seems to have been in reducing inflation, the Chancellor does not get full marks. It might seem pernicious to mark him down when, as he so rightly points out, inflation has been lower for longer than any time in the past 50 years. But the scoring is for skill and judgement as well as luck, and Mr Clarke has had to rely a lot on the latter.

So, deduct 10 for the technicality that the target measure of inflation has not fallen below 2.5 per cent by the end of the Parliament. This version of the inflation target was, rightly, changed when economists pointed out that it was absurd to focus on inflation at one point in time rather than continuously. But the Government never abandoned the first version altogether.

Deduct 20 for the fact that inflation has not been on target for well over two years. It was December 1994 when the target measure was last 2.5 per cent or below. It might make it for a month or two this year, but thereafter it will be heading up again.

Finally, another 20 points lost for the fact that the UK has not exploited a worldwide fall in inflation as effectively as most other countries. Britain's inflation performance remains in the bottom half of the interna-

tional league table, and one of the worst in Europe.

Still, luck is no bad thing, and Mr Clarke has done well to make the most of being Chancellor at a time when world inflation has been low. He has balanced the need for prudence against the normal desire of an unpopular government to bribe the voters with economic growth. He has raised interest rates at a time when a really blatant political manipulator would have avoided it.

Furthermore, he deserves admiration for having retained the affection of his officials while ignoring their advice. All round, a best plus for the inflation record but an alpha for style. What a shame we won't be receiving him back next semester. A career in the City or Europe would no doubt be his for the taking, should he so wish.

Labour's Post Office denial is not a denial

The Labour Party yesterday issued another of its ritual denials – this time that it intends to privatise the Post Office. This is standard policy during the election campaign for any piece of information which has not been officially authorised by Peter Mandelson and news-managed through the Walworth Road machine.

It was what is known in the trade as a non-denial denial. This newspaper reported that Labour was examining plans put forward by

the Post Office for its partial or even full privatisation. Labour replied that it had "no plans" to privatise the Post Office, which is not the same thing and leaves open a whole host of possibilities.

What is clear is that in his determination to fill the "black hole" in the public finances Gordon Brown is considering what for Labour would, until recently, have been some unthinkable ways of raising revenue. He calls it a review of national assets. Most other people would call it privatisation or something close.

Labour has already conceded that it is looking at air traffic control – having rejected privatisation out of hand only a few months ago. The Tots has put back on the list, notwithstanding Robin Cook's attempt to remove it. Labour has also said it will consider Parcelforce, which is the arm of the Post Office which delivers parcels.

It is now clear that the rest of the Post Office, Royal Mail and all, is somewhere on the agenda too. Labour prefers to call it "commercialisation" but where that ends and privatisation starts stretches the art of semantics to its very limits. John Prescott's plans for an injection of private-sector funds into the Tube push the concept of public ownership and control to breaking point. Kim Howells, the Labour front bench, who has the Post Office as part of his portfolio, makes some in the Tory party look left wing.

What is undeniable is that the Post Office makes a tempting target. This year the Gov-

ernment will milk £270m out of it through the PSBR. Next year the target is £330m. An outright sale, on the other hand, could raise £4bn.

When Mr Brown has used up the proceeds of his windfall tax he will be looking for other ways to rustle up cash. If part privatisation can be presented as a way of liberating the Post Office from the dead hand of Treasury control and the External Financing Limit, then a sale of say 49 per cent might be hard to resist. Just remember, it was a Labour government that first started selling shares in BP. Labour's denial should not be taken at face value.

Lloyd's proposals make a lot of sense

Having wiped the slate clean of its pre-1992 liabilities, it was only right that Lloyd's should turn its attention to ensuring that the structures were in place to ensure a similar catastrophe never happened again. Yesterday's proposals to require Names to top up the capital that backs their underwriting commitments goes a long way to achieving that aim. It also has the added attraction that if they choose to leave their exposure to Lloyd's unchanged, accepting a lower capacity to underwrite premiums as a consequence, they will need to reduce the capacity that has left rates looking so soggy.

Some Names will object to changes in the rules that limit the cavalier way in which they

can gear themselves up to the hit, bringing them in to line with Lloyd's new corporate members. But few would argue that leveling the playing field in this way is a rather more sensible approach than allowing limited liability members the latitude to write premiums to the same dizzy multiples as individuals have enjoyed.

Lloyd's is also right to recognise that it would never match up to its competitors if it failed to tighten up its risk assessment and improve both the quantity and quality of the assets with which it backs its policies. An impending credit rating assessment no doubt concentrated the mind, and if a few members' noses are put out of joint in the process, well so be it. Ostensibly a consultation document, yesterday's proposals are couched in uncertain terms as a take-it-or-leave-it deal.

Yesterday's proposals will help ensure that the gruesome spectacle of hopelessly naive people losing their homes is at least reduced. A few good years of easy pickings, however, will mean the market will continue to be backed by too many unsophisticated people who do not properly understand what uninsured liability means.

The risks involved in that outdated concept made sense perhaps in an 18th century coffee shop when capital was managed by its owners. These days it is not and the marginalisation of individual Names, few of whom properly understand the dangers, is as desirable as it is inevitable.

BAe returns on jet pass launch aid investment

Michael Harrison

Repayments by British Aerospace of launch aid for the Airbus A320 jet programme now exceed the £250m received from the Government in 1984, the company disclosed yesterday.

By the end of the decade total repayments, including interest, would have reached £500m, BAe added. From then on the government will receive a royalty on every A320 delivered.

The A320 has been Airbus's best-selling jet with world-wide sales standing at more than 1,150.

The announcement came as BAe prepares to seek launch aid for the next Airbus Industrie project, the A3XX – a 600-seater super jumbo expected to cost at least \$8bn (£5bn) to develop. BAe, which has a 20 per cent stake in the four-nation Airbus consortium, is likely to apply for £200m–£300m in government support.

The A320 was the first full Airbus programme in which

BAe participated from the start and launch aid, both for that aircraft and the later A330-A430 series, was heavily criticised by the US administration and US companies.

But BAe said that for every £1 it had borrowed to finance the A320, the Government will have recovered £2, proving the A320 has been an engineering money-spinner for the UK.

Had the Government deposited the same amount in a building society it would have received £2.34 for every £1 while an investment in the stock market would have produced a seven-fold return. Alternatively, for £250m invested in BAe shares in 1984 would be worth \$880m.

BAe said, however, that the Airbus programme had also been a significant wealth creator for the economy, safeguarding 25,000 direct and indirect jobs and adding nearly £1bn a year to Britain's trade balance.

The A320, a 250-seater single aisle aircraft designed to com-

pete with the Boeing 737, entered service in March 1988. Two derivatives, the 165-seater A321 and the 126-seater A319 have since been introduced. The launch aid was repayable in tranches depending on certain sales targets being met.

For the larger A330-A340 programme, which cost £4.5bn to launch, BAe received a total of £450m in support, again repayable through a levy on sales. Repayments are due to begin later this year.

The A330-A340 programme was launched in 1987. Orders for the two aircraft stand at 349 from 41 customers, of which 150 have so far been delivered. The launch of the programme was the centre of a huge diplomatic row between the US and the Airbus partner governments – Britain, France, Germany and Spain – over American allegations that the state support was illegal under world trade rules.

Boeing puts the market for a jet seating more than 550 at fewer than 500 while Airbus puts it near 1,400 over the next 20 years.



Money spinner: For every £1 borrowed by BAe to finance the Airbus A320 the government will have recovered £2.

Tie Rate
expands
in Japan

A model way to regulate new drugs that stands up to industry scrutiny

An EU agency in the heart of London has won the approval of the pharmaceutical industry and public alike, writes Magnus Grimond

rather than opposing member states we use their resources and efficiency which the EMEA has won since starting its work in early 1995, he is already comparing the new European organisation with the powerful Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US.

Implicit in Mr Sauer's thoughts is that the Europeans have come up with a better model than the Americans and one which might usefully be adopted elsewhere in the EU.

"We could be in the centre of controversies about federalism and so on, but we are not... We have managed to develop a model of co-operation where

EMEA employs just 113 people. On top of that, it can call on 2,000 experts from hospitals, universities and research laboratories around Europe to provide expert input to its deliberations over new drugs. This compares with some 4,000 directly employed by the FDA on pharmaceutical matters out of a total staff of over 12,000.

But the new body's main claim is its speed. It aims to have completed all its own approval processes within 210 days. Add on a further 90 days for its recommendation to be ratified by Brussels and member states to have their say, and most drugs

should be cleared or rejected in under a year. Its latest audit report shows it is hitting the target most of the time, with the main delays being caused by what it says are company requests that the clock be stopped while they supply more information.

Appropriately perhaps, notable successes have been in the AIDS field. Norvir, the combination treatment developed by the US group Abbott Laboratories, was cleared in a record 69 days last year, while Glaxo Wellcome's Epivir took just 150 days.

At the moment, all biotech products must be submitted to

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IN BRIEF

Arjo Wiggins chief's pay jumps 40%

Philippe Beylier, who replaced Alain Soulard as chief executive of Anglo-French paper group Arjo Wiggins Appleton, saw his pay leap 40 per cent to £560,000 last year. This was somewhat below the £617,000 paid the previous year to Mr Soulard, who left the group with an £826,140 payoff in March 1996. The latest annual accounts also showed that Mr Beylier's contract has a termination indemnity of 18 months on top of his normal six months' notice period should the company be taken over. The accounts also showed that Dale Schumaker, the head of US operations who left in March, saw his remuneration increase 35 per cent to £671,000, including a £21,000 top up to his pension to fund his early retirement.

Germany to keep interest rates steady

Hans Tietmeyer, Bundesbank president, cemented expectations of continued low interest rates in Germany. "We want to continue our steady-hand monetary policy. Our goal is currency stability," he said. German bonds rose as the outlook for steady interest rates confirmed and amid signs that economic growth in the country may be weaker than thought. Mr Tietmeyer said he saw no need to alter interest rates in Germany as the conditions for growth in Germany were in place, and further rate cuts would be counterproductive. He did not believe that higher import prices were "a risk for the internal price development, because the cost development in our economy seems to be under control". Inflation in Germany has been below the Bundesbank's target of 2 per cent for nearly two years, and it is not expected to exceed that level this year.

Decimal move upsets fraction faction

A Senate committee opened a debate on a reform of US stock markets replacing fractions with decimals in stock quotes. The reform aims to reduce commissions on share trades, which under the fraction system can now move only in 12.5 cent increments. Using decimals for stock quotes, which would require a reform of a 1934 law regulating stock trades, would allow investors to save some \$1.5bn (£925m), said Senator Wayne Allard.

Shareholders approve new C&W group

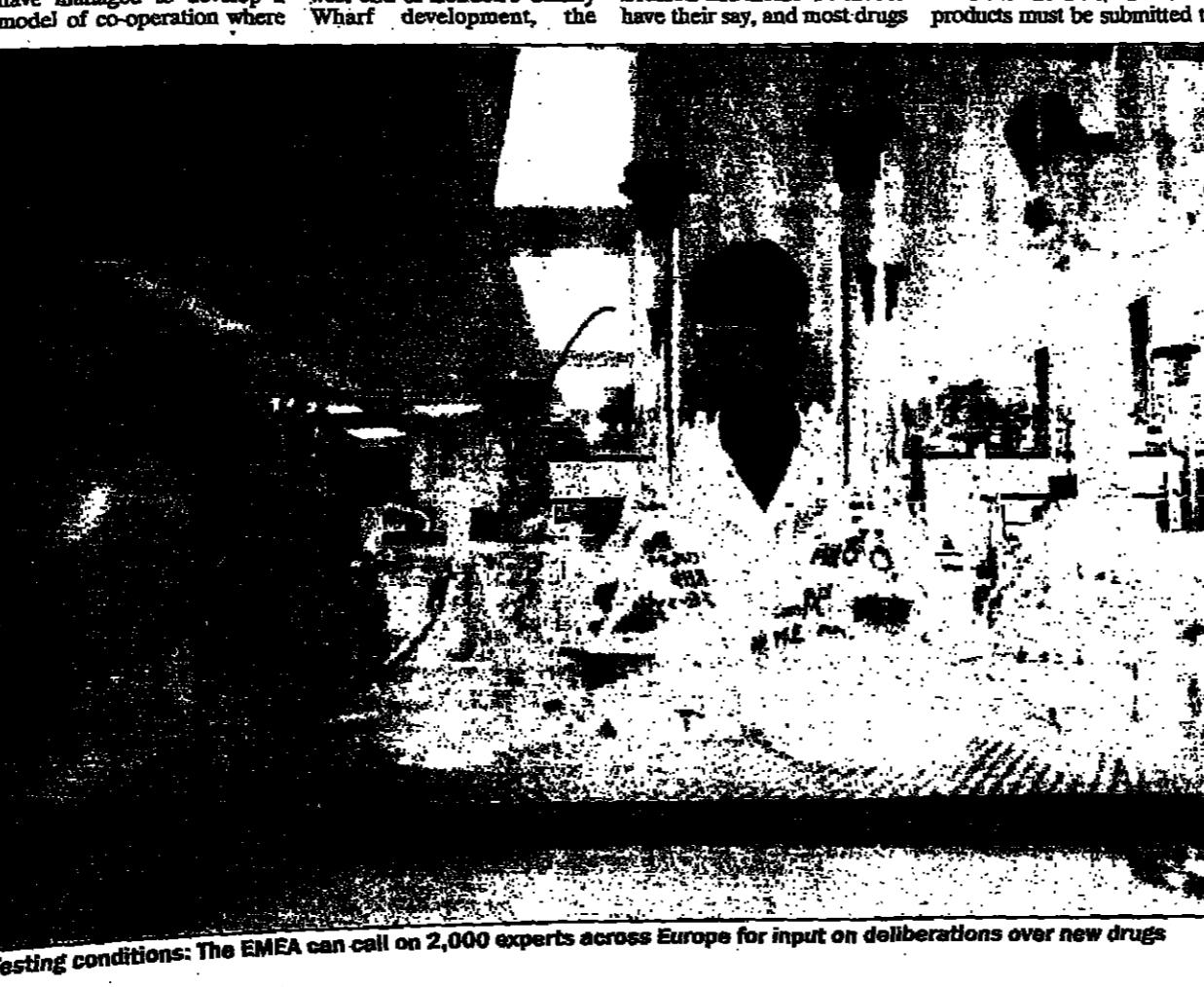
Cable & Wireless said shareholders at yesterday's extraordinary general meeting unanimously passed a resolution to create the Cable & Wireless Communications Group. Richard Brown, chief executive of C&W, said: "This is a major milestone in the creation of our new company which, as the largest provider of integrated telecommunication and television entertainment services in the UK, will be a powerful force in the UK telecommunications market." The creation of the new group will bring together Mercury Communications, the UK subsidiary of C&W, with Nynex CableComms and Bell Cablemedia.

Shuffle at William Morrison

William Morrison Supermarkets said Kenneth Morrison had relinquished his role as managing director but would retain the role of executive chairman. John Dowd, who has been with the company for 25 years and a director since 1983, will become managing director. George Buttler and Marie Melnyk have been appointed joint deputy managing directors.

LucasVarity buys back 10 million shares

LucasVarity bought back for cancellation some 10 million of its shares through Hoare Govett Securities at 18p each. The buy-back represents some 0.7 per cent of the company's share capital. Earlier this week the company announced plans to buy back 3 per cent of its shares this year.



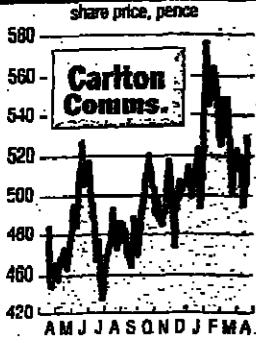
Testing conditions: The EMEA can call on 2,000 experts across Europe for input on deliberations over new drugs

market report / shares

Data Bank

FTSE 100	4298.9	+4.3
FTSE 250	4524.9	+0.3
FTSE 350	2117.7	+1.7
SEAO VOLUME	687.4m shares,	
	41,122 bargains	
Gifts Index	94.30	unchg

Share spotlight



Why Tesco could be regarded as a bit of a basket case

It is always brave to hit at a share riding high in the popularity stakes. After outscoring J Sainsbury and leading the supermarket charge into financial services Tesco has been one of the darlings of the stock market. Its upbeat profit performance and £640m move into Ireland have merely added to its appeal.

But Rowan Morgan, experienced retail analyst at Nikko, the Japanese securities house, reckons the adulation is too intense. And he believes that the shares should be sold.

He says they look fairly valued and "offer little upside potential, having outperformed the market by 11 per cent over the last 12 months". So those seeking excitement should look elsewhere.

Shares of the superstores group milled around, ending 1.5p higher at 354p. More favourable comments from AGB Research on Tesco's perfor-

mance in the supermarket sector probably offered support. In the past year the shares have been as low as 267p and as high as 370p.

Mr Morgan sees Tesco profits moving from £750m to £825m this year and reaching £955m next.

Tesco fell 1p to 110.5p and Sainsbury 4.5p to 321p. They have figures next month. Dresdner Kleinwort Benson was said to be suggesting Asda will produce £435m against £401.2m and Sainsbury will be down from £764m to £630m.

The rest of the market continued to ignore New York's sudden reawakening with Footsie after a confident start, struggling to stay in positive territory. It ended 4.3 points higher at 4,298.9.

Shares of the superstores group milled around, ending 1.5p higher at 354p. More favourable comments from AGB Research on Tesco's perfor-



MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

the world's biggest market

New York will, of course, continue to exert a deep influence on proceedings in London.

But its power seems to be much greater when it is in retreat. The adage if New York catches a cold then London sneezes still applies. But the market is much less interested when Wall Street is rising high. London has lagged a long way behind as New York has surged from 3,000 points in a little over two years.

Carlton Communications led blue chips higher. The share gained 22p to 528.5p following buy signals from Morgan Stanley. The US investment house is encour-

aged by Carlton's involvement in the British Digital Broadcasting consortium and looks for profits of £340.7m this year, £364.4m next and £407.3m the year after.

Bass fell 7.5p to 785p, lowest this year. Société Générale Strauss Turnbull was negative and the brewers' long struggle to swallow its Carlsberg Telety rival is beginning to sap sentiment. Allied Domexq gave up 8p to 428p, responding to recent SBC Warburg caution.

Standard Chartered was the day's banking favourite, up 18p to 865p on Schroders support. BT was unchanged at 442.5p despite bullish noises from JP

Morgan and Inchcape rose 7.5p to 263p with Panmure Gordon signalling a 300p target; National Grid gained 4.5p to 222.5p on Goldman Sachs support. But Smith & Nephew fell 3.75p to 176.25p on a rumoured Merrill Lynch downgrading.

Premier Farnell, the electronic components group that produced a shock profits warning in January is due to produce yearly figures on Monday. The warning sent the shares tumbling more than 15p in a few days, eventually hitting 457.5p. They rose 4p to 500p. Year's profits are likely to be around £125m against £110.9m. Still the group, which astonished the market with an audacious £1.8bn US takeover last year, must feel it has a promising tale to tell. It has arranged a series of investment meetings next week and is arranging to fly fund managers to its US operations.

LucasVarity commenced its share buy-back, picking up 10 million at 198p through ABN Amro Hoare Govett; the shares fell 3p to 195.5p. Engineer Spirax-Sarco improved 26p to 733p with talk of a bid from Siebe, off 2.5p to 943.5p.

Sports retailers were firm. JJB Sports rose 23p to 452p after chairman David Whelan promised any share sale would be on a modest scale; he has just over 30 per cent. Blacks Leisure added 14.5p to 475p. Peak Figures are due next month.

Vanguard Medica fell 5p to 625p. Greg Middleton suggests a year-end price of 1,507p.

Pitlochry, the oil group, gained 12p to 54.5p on the signalled US bid and Hill Hirsel shaded to 137p after raising £1.3m through a placing at 130p.

Dawson, the newspaper distributor, rose 11.25p to 340p after its 10-for-one share split.

Taking Stock

□ David Abell, the former Sutler chief who is involved in a shareholders revolt at mini-conglomerate Thomas Jordon, is taking a deeper interest in Turaplyke.

The day after the engineer announced a sharp profits advance to £257,000 Mr Sutler lifted his shareholding by 325,000 shares to 4.5 per cent. He has been close to the company, up 1p to 19p, for some time.

□ Minmetel's Ofex traded off-shore, Crediton Minerals, has seen "encouraging" evidence in its search for gold in Devon. Results of further tests should be known in August. Minmetel firmed 0.25p to 4p and Crediton 1p to 10p.

□ Financial bookie IG Index's middle quote for the closing price of shares of Alliance & Leicester on Monday is 498p.

Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	PE	PCF	Yld PE	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	PE	PCF	Yld PE	Stock	Price	Chg	Yld	PE	PCF	Yld PE
Alcoholic Beverages							Distributors							Internationals						
ABG Group	420	-1.0	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	A&G	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	ABX	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
Barclays	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&G	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BBG	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
Bank of Scotland	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BB&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
Barclays	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BB&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
Barclays	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BB&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
Barclays	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BB&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
Barclays	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BB&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
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Barclays	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BB&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0
Barclays	420	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	B&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.0	4.0	BB&S	100	-0.5	4.0	10.0	1.	

sport

Stoute believes in success Story

RacingRICHARD EDMONDSON
reports from Newmarket

There was a time when the 2,000 Guineas was almost a foregone conclusion after the Craven Stakes had been run. That time has passed.

It was a rather pitiful commentary on what the Classic trials has become when a revised price was scribbled up about the winner, Desert Story, yesterday. This was a colt who finished runner-up in the Royal Lodge Stakes and captured the Harris Hill last year, an animal whose trainer Michael Stoute has been planting flags of victory across the world since last autumn. Yet a price of 14-1 for the first Classic on 3 May hardly had the hordes bashing at the portcullis.

There are many horses ahead of Desert Story in the betting and, tellingly, some of them will be making their seasonal debuts in the Guineas. As the plums of late season are continually added to the programme book, the distressing information for traditionalists also seems to be that the Guineas has almost taken on the role of a prep race.

Stoute, nevertheless, will be happy to collect the bauble for Freemason Lodge. He would not rubbish the Craven, as this was his sixth success in the Group Three contest, and two

of those, Shadoud and Doyoun, went on to collect the 2,000.

The trainer is also more excited about Desert Story than others have been. "This horse goes along nice and quietly and he never gets shotted about, though his form is excellent and he's progressive," Stoute said. "I think he'll run very well in the 2,000. He's a lovely type of horse in every way."

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Colonel Blazier
(Ayr 2.30)
NB: Grapevine
(Newbury 3.40)

medium-sized, balanced and seems to go on either ground."

In second place was Grapeshot, who will now be stepped up to Cape Cross, who possesses the sort of backside you see in black and white movies by the side of a bucket on the floor of a colonial house kitchen. This is assumed to be the physique of a sprinter, though the men behind Cape Cross still think he can be a force in three weeks' time. Indeed, Frankie Dettori told his trainer, John Gosden, that he would never again finish behind the first two.

A further Guineas factor could be Stoute's Entrepreneur, who worked yesterday after racing. When the New

market man celebrated Singpiel's victory in the Dubai World Cup (with a liquid other than his name might suggest) he was seen to hug members of the Fourth Estate - which was rather like witnessing a mongoose waltz with a cobra. He was back to his stonewall best yesterday. They could have pulled his nails out or strapped him in a dentist's chair and the man would still not have divulged the relative merits of Entrepreneur and Desert Story.

Entrepreneur is already favourite for the Derby, and another who made inroads in the Epsom market yesterday was Fahrus, winner of the Foden Stakes. Before the froth of activity had been hosed from his chestnut neck, Will Hill had halved his price from 50-1 and Ladbrokes had 16-1.

While Fahrus was sweaty, his trainer, Ben Bambury, was typically slick of dress and tongue, and was soon congratulating Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum for his perspicacity in placing the horse with him. It must be difficult to ignore the claims of a man who goes to the trouble of making sure his breast-pocket handkerchief and socks match.

David Walsh was sweaty, his trainer, Tom Barton, was typically slick of dress and tongue, and was soon congratulating Sheikh Hamdan Al Maktoum for his perspicacity in placing the horse with him. It must be difficult to ignore the claims of a man who goes to the trouble of making sure his breast-pocket handkerchief and socks match.

LEADING TRAINERS WITH WINNERS: P Chapple-Hyam - 36 winners from 148 runners gives a success rate of 24.2% and is just a 1.1 level stake of 520.73; J Godden - 20 winners, 118 runners, 24.6%, +187.85; W Hannon - 28 winners, 363 runs, 6.66%, -180.72; P Cole - 21 winners, 177 runners, 11.9%, +18.71; N Larking - 20 winners, 154 runs, 13.1%, +17.72; T Dettoni - 24 winners, 154 runs, 15.7%, +15.25; R Neale - 25 winners, 234 riders, 12.4%, +13.80; BLINKED FIRST TIME: Sword Arm (shored) (3-40) Mazur (3-40). WINNERS IN LAST SEVEN DAYS: Dancing Cavalier (6-10) was at Nottingham on Friday. LONG-DISTANCE RUNNERS: Top Goss (5-10) has been sent 322 miles by Mrs J Rossden from Sandhurst, North Yorkshire.

NEWBURY with Independent ratings for the televised races

2.10 **Milana** 4.10 Dashing Blue
2.40 **Surgeon** 4.40 St Radegund
3.10 **Calypso Grant** 5.10 Dancing Cavalier
3.40 **Ghataas**

GOING: Good in Firm.

DRAW ADVANTAGE: None.

Left-hand, level course.

Comes as south-east of town near A54, Railway station (service from London Paddington) adopts course. ADMISMISSION: Members £14; Guests £8; Silver Ring 51 (OAPS half price); 12-18s £10; 18-21s £12; or under free all enclosure. CAR PARK: Free. Pits: 500. Boxed: 50. Total: 1,000.

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2.10 **ESF BECKHAMPTON NOVICE STAKES (CLASS D) £5,000 added 5/40** **3/40** **Penalty Value £8,818**

added 5/40s

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Leicester ponder European future

Football

JON BROOKIN

Leicester City yesterday reflected with pride and astonishment on the European adventure which awaits them following their 1-0 victory over Middlesbrough in Wednesday's Coca-Cola Cup final replay at Hillsborough.

The win, which came courtesy of a volley from Steve Claridge midway through extra time, has propelled Leicester into Conti-

England's latest footballing milestones

- European Champions' League
- Premiership championship and association
- European Cup-Winners' Cup
- FA Cup

Leicester City (Koop-Oliver) scored 3rd, 4th and 5th in Premiership competition for only the second time in their history. Judging by the reaction of bookmakers' William Hill, who yesterday installed Leicester at 60-1 to win the UEFA Cup, the current team are expected to fare little

better than their predecessors, who lost to Atletico Madrid in the second round of the Cup-Winners' Cup 35 years ago.

However, Martin O'Neill's team demonstrated on Wednesday the sort of spirit and organisation which should serve them admirably against continental opposition. Although fortunate when Emerson squandered a chance to equalise in the closing minutes, Leicester subdued the creative hub of Middlesbrough's team, restricting Juninho to one long-range effort.

"A lot of teams have been disappointing in Europe, but we're a hard-working team and will give it our best shot," the Leicester midfielder Gary Parker said.

"We are a hard team to beat; we work for each other,

and we'll just see what happens. But Leicester in Europe? Who would have believed it at the start of the season?"

Claridge reacted with similar incredulity to the rewards which await him after a nomadic career spent largely in the lower divisions. "A lot of people thought I was more likely to end up on a park bench than in Europe," he said. "There have been a lot of times when I have been tempted to pack it in, but I stuck at it because I love the buzz of scoring goals."

The Leicester chairman, Martin Smeaton, yesterday urged O'Neill to agree a long-term deal before his contract expires at the end of next season. He assured the manager, who has masterminded Leicester's resurgence, that money from the club's summer flotation would be made available for new players.

"It is a priority to ensure that a successful manager – as Martin undoubtedly is – is as secure as possible," Smeaton said. "Hopefully the day will come when Leicester can sign players of the quality of Juninho, Ravanelli and Zola. It's not a dream. It's what we are working for."

Woking at Wembley

Non-League notebook

RUPERT METCALF

For the third time in four seasons, Woking are going to Wembley to contest the FA Umbro Trophy final. After winning a tough battle against Stevenage Borough in Wednesday's semi-final replay at Watford, their opponents on Sunday 18 May will be Dagenham & Redbridge, who overcame Gloucester City by the same 2-1 scoreline in another replay at Slough.

After enjoying Wembley triumphs against Runcorn in 1994 and Kidderminster Harriers the following year, Woking will be the clear favourites to complete a hat-trick of victories against their opponents from the ICS League. In front of a crowd of nearly 6,000 at Vicarage Road, Clive Walker gave Woking a first-half lead with a superb long-range shot. Andy Ellis bundled in a corner to double the lead in the second half, and all Stevenage could offer in reply was a late goal from Jason Solomon.

Despite their achievements in the Trophy and in the FA Cup, not everyone at the Surrey side

is satisfied. "It's been a difficult season," Geoff Chapple, their manager, admitted yesterday. "We've had a magnificent time in the cups but we should have done better in the Conference."

Another Trophy win would be consolation for failing to secure promotion to the Football League, however.

As for Dagenham & Redbridge, they saw off Gloucester City, from the D Martens League, on Wednesday. David Holmes gave Gloucester an early lead but a goal in each half from John Stimson turned the game around. Gloucester's efforts to recover were not helped by a second-half red card for their top scorer, Dale Watkins.

Stimson was an appropriate match-winner for his team, for he has played for three of the clubs who merged to form Dagenham & Redbridge: Leytonstone & Ilford, Dagenham, and Redbridge Forest. Although the current club have never been to Wembley, Dagenham did so four times, losing FA Amateur Cup finals in 1970 and '71 and returning for Trophy finals in 1977 and 1980. When they became the first club from southern England to win the tournament.

USA v Canada

In 1969, the Concacaf World Cup qualifying tournament led to a brief war between El Salvador and Honduras. Now, although no violence has erupted, it is the USA who are the lone survivors of the United States' bid to fall out.

The Canadian football association is challenging the eligibility of a German-born American, former Bayern Munich striker, Wagner, who failed to prove he beat Canada 3-0 last month. The Canadians say Wagner, the son of an American who was a student in Germany in the 1970s, played four games for Germany's Under-18 team in Uefa tournaments in 1986 and 1988 and is ineligible to play for the States.

Last year, the US coach Steve Sampson announced

that the USA would not be able to field a team in the tournament unless the Canadian FA accepted his interpretation of the rules.

Canada's national team has been unable to qualify for the tournament, which begins on 2 May because he is down in eighth place, with 180 points, and this is the last event in which points for this season can be earned.

While not exactly abandoning the female competitors to cardboard city – £373,500 will go to the singles champion – the All England Club has again declined to grant equal prize-money with the men, whose singles champion will receive £415,000.

"It's still the public's view that they prefer the men's matches

Hickman misses 100m medal

Swimming

James Hickman's hopes of giving Britain a medal-winning start disappeared amid farce in the first session of the World Short-Course Championships in Gothenburg last night.

Hickman, who qualified with the third-fastest time, broke his heart in the victory lane, another new best of 51.95sec. Hickman, who finished sixth in last year's Olympic games, was placed third with a time of 52.02, just behind his compatriot Geoff Huegill.

Hickman's medal hopes had

been raised when the Russian world record holder, Denis Pankratov, failed to qualify for the final after finishing only fourth in his heat. However, in the final, Hickman, a student at Manchester University, was held lower than the championship record to 51.10. The All

supermarket chain will become the title sponsor of the British Challenge – Great Britain versus an International Select team – at Crystal Palace on 18 August, one of the four key events which will be shown live on Channel 4 this summer. The

Carter 'back in business' with a 68

Golf

Tulse Hill have come a long way in just 10 years: indeed, all the way to Milton Keynes and the Women's Inter-League play-offs which start this afternoon, writes Bill Colwill.

The South First Division winners open against Colwall, from the West, and then tomorrow, Paynton, from the North, and Bury St Edmunds, finishing on Sunday against Aldridge. The first two of the round-robin tournaments go through.

However, Tulse Hill are not without players with League experience. Kath Tilbury, Kate Coward and Jen Waghorn, along with the Irish pair, the captain Sheena Bailey and Michelle Flanagan, will be showing the way.

Aldridge, who won the Royal Al-Faisel Midland Premier from Crimson Ramblers, are perhaps the favourites. Reluctant from the National League last season, they are determined to win their place back.

Damon Hill, England's leading singles player, returns after being injured for three months to play in the fast tournament of the British Grand Slam at Redbridge, which starts tomorrow. He cannot now qualify for the British Open, which starts on 2 May because he is down in eighth place, with 180 points, and this is the last event in which points for this season can be earned.

David Carter, who underwent a brain operation just over two months ago, took a share of the early lead at the Cannes Open yesterday with a three-under-par 68.

The Briton, who had an operation to remove fluid from the brain after collapsing two days before the British Desert Classic, said he felt fine and was "back in business", but he is troubled by short-term memory loss. "I had to ask the caddy the name of my playing partners in the pro-am soon after they told me them because I tend to forget things from five minutes ago," he said. "But I got the thinking side of my game right, the thing that I was most worried I'd forgotten."

Carter, who had birdies at the 10th, 13th and 17th to share the lead with another Briton, Paul Broadhurst, added: "I'm extremely happy because I didn't know what to expect coming back out on tour again."

Wednesday's late results: Badminton: 1st: G. Cooper (GBR); 2nd: J. Carter (GBR); 3rd: S. Carter (GBR); 4th: S. Carter (GBR). Tennis: 1st: J. Carter (GBR); 2nd: S. Carter (GBR); 3rd: S. Carter (GBR); 4th: S. Carter (GBR).

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Boris Becker follows through on his service against Lionel Roux in the Japan Open in Tokyo yesterday. The former Wimbledon champion pulled a muscle in his right thigh and was beaten by the 16th-seeded Frenchman

Photograph: Reuter

Wimbledon overrule equal pay

Tennis

JOHN ROBERTS

Psst! Want two together for Wimbledon's new No 1 Court? Consult your local clergy. Songs of Praise is to be recorded in the bowl of the stadium on Sunday 1 June and shown by the BBC on the middle Sunday of the championships (29 June). How many women tennis players will be inclined to add their voices re-

main to change the way we are?

The Women's Tennis Association had asked for the differential to be narrowed from the quarter-finals onwards. What they got was a 7.5 per cent increase on last year's singles winner's prize. So did the men. The total pot – £6.85m is 6.5 per cent more than in 1996, when the club made a record profit of £29.1m.

Responding to the announcement, the WTA Tour said it would continue to lobby the All England Club. "There is a worldwide boom in women's tennis, due to increased depth in fields and the rise of our

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The point that men play over the best of five sets is countered by the women's contention that more rallies can be seen in their best of three set contests. They argue that the increased power afforded by racket technology, which has tended to diminish the men's game as a spectacle on the fast grass courts, has improved the standard of the women's game. Billie Jean King, ever a champion of equality, has even suggested that the men play two out of three sets. "It's boring, five sets. This is the 1990s."

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This year marks the 30th anniversary of the last Wimbledon championships closed to professionals. After beating Britain's Ann Jones in the 1967 final, King returned next year, when tennis first went open, to complete a hat-trick of triumphs. She received £750 in 1968, while Rod Laver won £2,000 for the men's title.

The bottom club in the first division, Swinton, have appointed the former Great Britain loose forward, Les Holliday, as their new coach.

London Broncos will have the high number – for them – of five British players in their line-up against Salford tonight. Shaun Edwards and Tuias Follett will be joined by the former Cambridge University captain, Adrian Spencer, at hooker and by two players making their full Super League debuts: the Scottish full-back, Nick Mardon, and the London-born prop, Matt Salter, who won a place on Great Britain's Academy tour of New Zealand last year after just a handful of games of rugby league.

The first open Wimbledon offered a total of £26.150 in prize money. This year, £48,500 will be spent on the 33 and over women's invitation doubles.

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Why this is a dangerous season for England

A new cricket season heralds many things. Already there has been doom and gloom from *Wisden*, a double century by Jonathan Lewis for his new club, Durham, against Oxford University and two days in a charm school for Atherton and his winter warriors. An exercise to teach them among other things how to behave like a team. Oh and the Australians are coming too, a muscular presence that will give Lord MacLaurin and all those at the England Cricket Board plenty to think about when they draw up their plans for restructuring the domestic game later in the season.

In many ways it is a dangerously tricky season for English cricket: win the Ashes and the necessary changes to the structure of county cricket may not go far enough; lose heavily and things may just become a bit too

brutal, such as the introduction of two divisions.

If it were needed, partial evidence of this has already been seen from the recent goings on at Sussex, where the rapid disarray of its more coveted talent to other counties is really just a sneak preview of what will happen to all those languishing at the bottom of the second division.

The future of county cricket has, financially at least, long been in Test cricket's pocket. Bizarrely, however, it is Test cricket that has been held in thrall by the counties, with players prioritising being firmly with their clubs and not their country.

It is a situation that is bound to affect more than the odd performance at international level and one that is thankfully now being addressed with some clubs beginning to rest players.

So far, despite the warnings

of Lord MacLaurin that the national side must start winning, the game is still popular. Apparently, the first four days of the Lord's Test could have been sold three times over, an indicator that the game's finances are looking as healthy as ever. A view confirmed when Vodafone stepped in to replace Tetley as sponsors of the England team.

But can an England side with two Test victories from five Tests against two of the weakest sides in the world beat a team who has just dispatched a thousand rural curries beyond the boundary rope, but spin bowlers and batsmen are already dipping their spinning fingers and bats into various oils and impregnations in anticipation of a bumper season on bone dry pitches and outfields.

This lack of rain is not likely

to help England whose batsmen will have to contend not only

with Shane Warne but Michael Bevan too. Similarly, our seam bowlers prefer a bit of grass and moisture to help hone their cutting edge. Somehow Australia must be prevented from achieving scores over 400.

Now that the Australian squad has been announced, leaving some counties such as Yorkshire and Surrey engaged in a mad dash to find an overseas player, the question again arises whether they are a necessary part of the summer game?

With so many countries now engaged in year-round activity, the quality of imports is not always guaranteed. Indeed, there was going to be a moratorium on

them in 1999, an experiment now cancelled by popular demand from the counties, who feel they cannot do without them.

Britain seems hooked on exotica and supermarkets, as well as most Premier division football clubs, are full of expensive foreign produce. In fact, the latest trend in cricket is not with overseas players, who have been around since before the war, but with foreign coaches.

Dav Whinmore at Lancashire, John Wright at Kent, Les Stillman at Derbyshire and Dave Gilbert at Surrey are just four of a burgeoning number now installed around the counties: surely a more telling factor to support *Wisden's* claims that the game is stagnating.

Personally, I feel overseas players can add a certain frisson to a club. As long as the player in question has more than 20

caps for his country, then a county is far more likely to learn things from him, than vice versa: the perennial complaint levelled at overseas professionals. If Surrey can overcome the loss of their Australian Brendon Julian, they could break their 26 year drought in the Championship, although Leicestershire are unlikely to take any challenge on their title lightly.

For people hoping for a closely fought Ashes series there were encouraging signs in New Zealand that Atherton had finally put together the kind of team he had come close to forging four years ago in the West Indies: before Raymond Illingworth rode in and stamped his confusion on proceedings.

With a settled and balanced unit there will – unless England lose the first three Tests heavily – be only one or two places for

Major fixtures for 1997

APRIL

- 23 Britannic Assurance County Championship begins
- 27-28 Life Sunday League begins
- 28 Benson and Hedges Cup begins

MAY

- 22 ENGLAND v AUSTRALIA: 1st Grace Trophy one-day International (Headingley)
- 24 ENGLAND v AUSTRALIA: 2nd Grace Trophy one-day International (The Oval)
- 25 ENGLAND v AUSTRALIA: 3rd Grace Trophy one-day International (Lord's)
- 27 Benson and Hedges Cup quarter-finals

JUNE

- 5-9 ENGLAND v AUSTRALIA: 1st Cornhill Test (Edgbaston)
- 10 Benson and Hedges Cup semi-finals

JULY

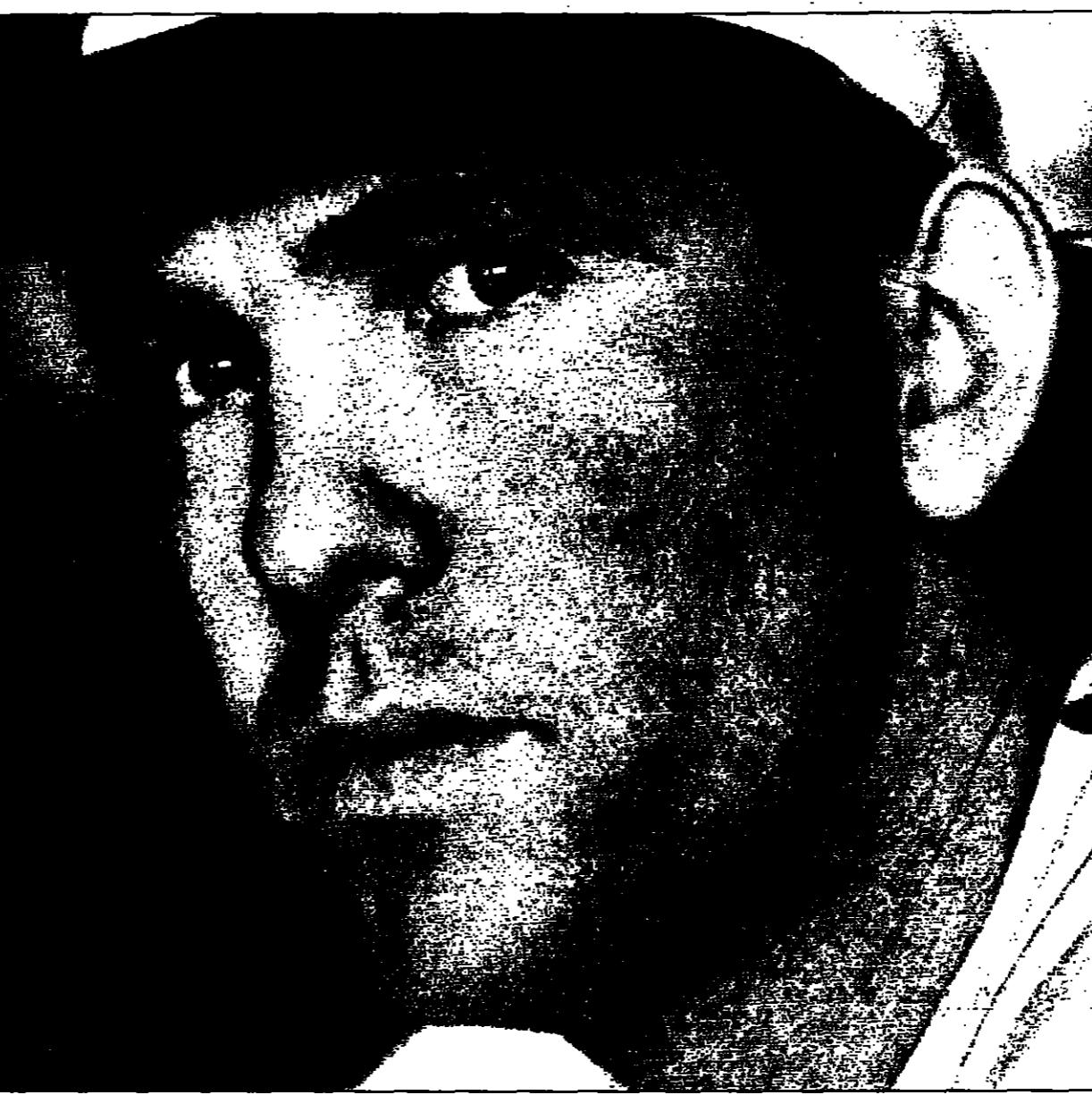
- 3-7 ENGLAND v AUSTRALIA: 3rd Cornhill Test (Old Trafford)
- 8 NatWest Trophy second round
- 12 Benson and Hedges Cup final (Lord's)
- 24-28 ENGLAND v AUSTRALIA: 4th Cornhill Test (Headingley)
- 29 NatWest Trophy quarter-finals

AUGUST

- 7-11 ENGLAND v AUSTRALIA: 5th Cornhill Test (Trent Bridge)
- 12-13 NatWest Trophy semi-finals

SEPTEMBER

- 6 NatWest Trophy final (Lord's)
- 14-16 Life Sunday League finishes
- 18 County Championship final matches



Dermot Reeve: 'I've enjoyed the coaching more than I did playing'

Photograph: David Ashdown

'I want to create the right cricketing environment for the players to be able to play good, positive and confident cricket'

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The contrast between Edgbaston and Taunton is something Reeve is having to adapt to. "The pace of life here's a bit slower, people are a bit more laid back generally. But it's dif-

ferent and I must say, so far, I've enjoyed the coaching more than I did playing. The hardest thing is constantly analysing whether you should talk to a player about a flaw in his technique, for example, whether that's going to be good for his confidence. I want to create what is the right cricketing environment for the players to be able to relax and play good, positive and confident cricket."

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"We want to get promising young athletes and sports people to think, 'Well I might fancy being a cricketer.' If you take the Neville brothers at Manchester United, both young cricketers on the Lancashire books, but if you've got the choice of playing for Manchester United or Lancashire, well, Manchester United at the minute is going to win."

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"We had a team meeting and Ray Illingworth said, 'Can anybody pick him?' from his leg-break to his googly. I just put my hand up straight away because

it's difficult to compare the clubs at this stage, and I don't want to. You have to talk to the players about experiences but you don't want to harp on about 'this is what we used to do at Warwickshire.'

One of those players, Mushtaq Ahmed, will be expected to play a leading role as a wicket-taker, and Reeve will be only too happy to have the Pakistani on his side at last. He remembers being dismissed by Mushtaq in the 1992 World Cup final in Melbourne, as well as in the last World Cup.

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Classic trial trail
Richard Edmondson at
Newmarket, page 26

sport

Coach's tale
Dermot Reeve tells of life
in his new role, page 28

Top clubs swallow all £12m new deal

Rugby Union

CHRIS HEWITT

English rugby raised a farewell glass to the dear old Courage League yesterday and, with just the merest hint of a beery belch, clambered aboard a new £12m gravy train called the Allied Dunbar Premiership. For brewers read financial services, for foaming pints read personal protection plans, for the common good read naked Slitism.

Very modern, very ruthless. The insurance company's undoubtedly substantial investment will be swallowed whole by the 24 clubs in the top two divisions,

Wales will play next season's internationals at Wembley Stadium while work continues on the new £114m Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, the WRU confirmed yesterday. Wales will host New Zealand, Scotland and France at the home of English football, with minor games against Romania, Italy and Canada being staged at smaller grounds, yet to be confirmed.

now to be known as Allied Dunbar Premiership One and Two. No other club will lay a finger on the lot; from Reading and Leeds in the existing Third Division to Minchinhampton and Witton-under-Edge in the direst depths of Gloucestershire Four, the great hinterland of the rugby landscape will be left to fend for itself.

Not that the movers and shakers of the English Rugby Partnership, the new management body charged with the organisation and running of domestic competitions, will lose too much sleep on that score. Yesterday's ratification ceremony was a triumph for the senior club activists who fought the Rugby Football Union to a standstill for a year and, as a result, now hold positions of enormous influence in the game.

Indeed, if the announcement of Allied Dunbar's three-year commitment signalled a great leap forward in the financial sense, it was even more striking as a symbol of the shift in the balance of power at the top end of the sport. While Donald

Kerr, the chairman of ERP and a leading protagonist in rugby's bitter civil war, held court at the top table yesterday, John Richardson, the RFU president, was sitting anonymously among the hot polli.

Kim Deshayes, the ERP chief executive, described the Premiership deal as "a giant step forward towards a proper professional structure for rugby in the new century" and predicted that each First Division club could expect £100,000 annually direct from the Allied Dunbar pot. "That's treble the income from the existing sponsorship deal with Courage," he pointed out.

But before the ink was dry on the contract, Kerr was warning the biggest-spending clubs that current wage levels were unsustainable. "There's not much we at ERP can do about over-inflated wages because it is illegal to impose a salary cap," he said. "It might be possible to contain salary expenditure within a certain proportion of income, but that's his poorer clubs far harder than the better off. The age of the sugar daddy is by no means over; in fact, I'm not sure it will ever be over."

The best ERP estimate on the total money available to the clubs it represents next season – worked out on the basis of Allied Dunbar cash, Sky broadcasting revenue and funds arising from the Heineken and Pilkington Cups – is close to £10m. Split between the two Premiership divisions on a two-thirds-one-third basis, it still leaves a black hole in many balance sheets that can only be filled by heavy outside investment.

Meanwhile, the RFU will attempt to ease the financial fears of the vast majority of English clubs by piecing together a package of small sponsorship deals designed specifically to send money trickling down to the grass roots.

The first of those was secured this week when NPI, the pensioners group, agreed to support the Junior and Intermediate cup finals at Twickenham on 3 May and the RFU is also hopeful that Courage will continue to back the sport at local league level.

The FA's five-strong delega-

tion met Uefa executives in Geneva to put their case for being given the right to bid against Germany for the 2006 World Cup. After the discussions it was clear that Uefa was backtracking from its February assertion that it had already committed itself to the German bid.

Two months ago, Uefa's general secretary, Gerhard Aigner, sent the FA a fax informing it of official Uefa backing for

demands of the best, as many younger brothers do.

Only past singles champions who have won Wimbledon three times or more will be invited to form a guard of honour when the Duke of Kent, the club's president, conducts the opening ceremony on Monday 23 June.

Circular in plan, and drawing inspiration from the original design of the Centre Court, the new No 1 Court will have approximately 11,000 clear-view seats, 4,500 more than the old No 1 Court, which was closed last September. Since then, the North Stand and the Lower West Open Stand of the old No 1 Court have been demolished, and the area will be cordoned off for this year's championships. Photographs: David Ashdown

Wimbledon prize-money increases, page 27

England claim victory over Germany

Football

RUPERT METCALF

Football Association officials flew back to England last night convinced that they had emerged victorious from the latest round of their World Cup conflict with Germany and Uefa, European football's governing body.

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Two months ago, Uefa's general secretary, Gerhard Aigner, sent the FA a fax informing it of official Uefa backing for

Germany's bid, which is headed by Franz Beckenbauer.

That brought a furious response from the FA, backed by both major political party leaders, with the FA pledging to fight for the right to stage the World Cup for the first time in 40 years.

While Uefa reaffirmed yesterday that it did want to support only one candidate, its executive committee admitted that England did have every

right to submit a bid. That was seen as a success by Michael Davies, whose director of public affairs, David Davies, said: "We're flying home with a very positive attitude because we feel our position has been vindicated."

Uefa is now unlikely to back either bid until late next year. Chelsea have announced a four-year multi-million pound sponsorship deal with the car windscreens company, Autoglass. Barry Horne has stepped down as the captain of Wales, but will still be available for selection to the national side.

Gary McAllister, the Coventry midfielder, is in line to win his 50th cap for Scotland in the World Cup qualifier against Sweden in Gothenburg later this month, while the Hibernian goalkeeper Jim Leighton is due make his 78th appearance for his country, becoming the second most-capped Scot after Kenny Dalglish.

SCOTLAND SQUAD (World Cup qualifier v Sweden, Gothenburg, 30 April): Leighton; McAllister, Heaney, Johnston, Smith; McInnes, McCann, Lawrie, Lee, Murray; Ferguson, Wallace, McColl, Gullacher, Docherty; Gemmill, Birmingham, Ferguson, Hendry, Chapman, Dicks, McAllister, Lawrie, Murray; McManaman, B. McAllister, McCormick, R. McAllister, Cowie, McColl, Reilly, McGinn, Blackburn, McLaren, Jutjitz, McMenamin.

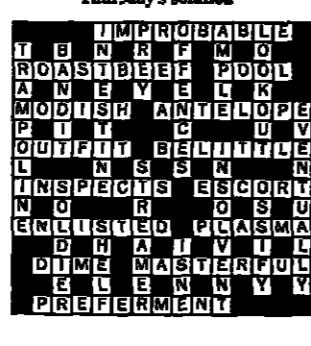
More football, page 27
Villa cheer City, page 21
Business Diary, page 25

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3276 Friday 18 April

By Phil

Thursday's solution



- ACROSS
1 Wanting Doc, along with Sleepy, to be very bored? (4,3,5)
9 Bet one means to keep for future use (3,4)
10 Exhaust oily stuff that is found around half of Gulf (7)
11 Tie up space, on reflection (4)
12 Hard to follow military leader's simple act (5)
13 "Name" with a following is irredeemably inferior (4)
14 Dicky or Mike's annoying (7)
17 Marine company backing European one, I see (7)
18 Comfortable after returning sought-after report (7)
21 Edition of book, one in unused condition, with price (7)

- DOWN
1 Money-lender's reserved a form of security (7)
2 Farm animals run away from birds (4)
3 I meant to dance round at an unpredictable moment (7)
4 Actual achievement encompassed by English writer abandoning English (4,5)
5 Very interested in powerless horse (4)
6 Fix English weather? (7)
7 I'm clambering wildly, trapping foot in metal structure (8,5)
8 Those producing records will be justified by this element of comedy (7,6)
14 Cries of surprise sent up in disturbance (3-2)
15 Beautiful valley, not entirely tame (5)
19 Most of mission about Bible turned up in part of Spain (7)
20 Chap, sailor, one of five (7)
21 Impose new cut in film after it's seat round (7)
22 This quaking upset the whole strip of land (7)
26 One interminable shout will do for murder victim (4)
27 Resort where the outer parts of your hotel are being rebuilt (4)

Australia keep faith with talismanic Taylor

Cricket

DEREK PRINGLE

The first serious salvo of this summer may still be a month away, but Australia have declared their squad of combatants. Once more they are to be led by their thoughtful and inspirational captain, Mark Taylor, ending speculation that he would be left behind to groove his golf swing. Seven-eights players have been named, including the opening batsman Michael Slater, Yorkshire's overseas signing until the call of more glorious matters beckoned.

It is bizarre that some of us even entertained the possibility that Taylor's job was under threat. He is comfortably the best Test captain around and, although his personal form is the scratchiest of his career – he has not reached 50 in his last 20 innings – he keeps leading his side to victory.

Taylor, speaking in Sydney yesterday, said: "It is a relief. It's just nice to be on another Australian team. Going as captain is something very special."

Surgeon have opted not to chase a replacement for Brendon Julian, who is also in the squad. They say they are happy to rely on their up and coming youngsters.

Glamorgan intend to have Waqar Younis, the Pakistan fast bowler, back in Cardiff within the next 10 days to assess the injury their overseas signing picked up in Sri Lanka yesterday.

Waqar was initially reported as suffering from a stress fracture of the left ankle that would keep him out of action for a minimum of six weeks. But inquiries by the county indicate the problem is not as serious as was first feared and relates to the toe, not the ankle. Glamorgan's secretary, Mike Fatin, admitted he was still "concerned".

Lloyd's batters rookies, page 23

However, the appointment of Steve Waugh as vice-captain over Ian Healy, the previous holder, will clearly indicate to Taylor that a long-term replacement is being lined up should his bad trot continue.

The appointment of Waugh, now 31, has not pleased Healy, who said he considered the move to be "a minor personal blow". But if England are hoping to make any currency out of the situation, Healy, who was banned for two one-day matches in South Africa for throwing his bat, quickly closed ranks, saying: "In good teams the personal never gets in the way of team goals." His understudy will be Adam Gilchrist, a young keeper himself being touted as a future leader of his country.

The only other surprise is the omission of Paul Reiffel, who bowled so well here four years ago. The Victorian seam and swing bowler has been suffering from injury. In his absence, the selectors have been impressed by Andrew Bichel, a stocky, bustling 26-year-old paceman from Queensland.

He, along with Glenn McGrath and Jason Gillespie, will form the front-line seam attack, while Brendon Julian and Michael Kasprowicz, with county cricket experience at Surrey and Essex respectively, will provide the support.

Shane Warne will bowl the bulk of the spin, with Michael Bevan offering a less reliable mirror image of the blond Victorian's stupendous talents.

Mark Waugh can bowl either off-spin or seam whenever the situation dictates and is the stylish end of a batting line-up crack-a-block with runs. With Healy coming in as low as No 8, England's bowlers can ill afford to have the kind of off-day they had at Headingley in 1989, when Australia notched up 601.

Presuming Taylor continues to open, the tourists may pair him with the re-instated Slater, while the left-handed Matthew Elliott comes in at No 3. Elliott, who began his Test career nervously, has expanded his strokeplay to the extent that he was last seen bashing Allan Donald and co all over the Waveriders.

If the front end has its flaws,

however, the middle-order more than covers the cracks.

Waugh, Waugh, Bevan and Blewett may sound like a firm of accountants, but England's bowlers will have to get through them time after time if their batsmen do not want to be facing a large deficit on the balance sheet by the time the second innings starts.

AUSTRALIA SQUAD (Engaged tour): M A Taylor (New South Wales, captain, age 32); Y撕; S R Waugh (NSW, vice-captain, age 31); S Gargan (Queensland, 27); M H. Johnson (Queensland, 26); M A Kasprowicz (Queensland, 25); M E. Johnson (Queensland, 24); M A Bichel (Queensland, 23); M A Gilchrist (Queensland, 22); A J Blundell (Queensland, 21); D M. T. Jones (Queensland, 20); M E. Elliott (Queensland, 19); M A Bevan (Queensland, 18); M A Blewett (Queensland, 17); A C. G. Johnson (Queensland, 16); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 15); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 14); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 13); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 12); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 11); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 10); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 9); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 8); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 7); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 6); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 5); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 4); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 3); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 2); M A. Johnson (Queensland, 1).

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